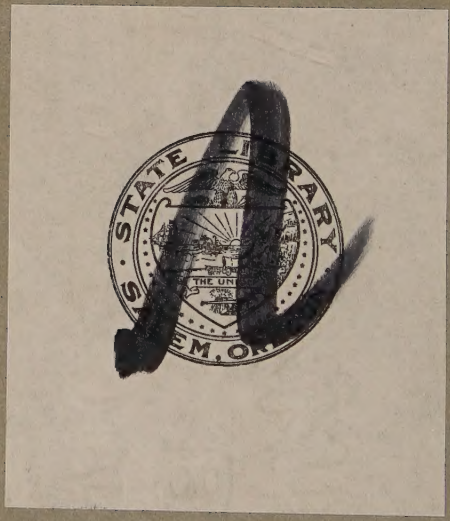
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JURGEN AND THE LAW
(*Edited by Guy Holt*)

# *STRAWS AND PRAYER-BOOKS*

## *Dizain des Diversions*

*By*

JAMES BRANCH CABELL

---

*"Behold the child, by Nature's kindly law,*
*Pleased with a rattle, tickled with a straw. . . .*
*Scarfs, garters, gold, amuse his riper stage,*
*And beads and prayer-books are the toys of age."*

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To

BALLARD HARTWELL CABELL

*is dedicated whatever may be of worth in this volume, or elsewhere in the Biography.*

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THE AUTHOR OF JURGEN

"As to the book of the Laws composed by him, what good have they done us? And yet he ought (as Lycurgus did the Lacedæmonians, and as Solon did the Athenians, and Zaleucus the Thurians), if they were excellent, to have persuaded some to adopt them. How, then, can we consider Plato's conduct anything but ridiculous?—since he appears to have written his laws, not for men who have any real existence, but rather for a set of persons invented by him."

# *The Author of Jurgen*

## § 1

"BUT this is grossly unfair!" John Charteris complained. "All these long years you have been promising to write a book about me. And now, it seems, I am to remain forever a minor character."

"Well—!" I admitted.

"And why, pray?"

"Well—!" I explained: and I went on, "I mean, of course, that is, after I had given the matter real consideration—" Then I summed it all up even more completely. "But, come now, Charteris! you, as a writer yourself, know how these submitted notions by and by come back from the cellar of what we—well, as one might say, fraudulently—term the subconscious; and come back either transmuted into something quite different or else marked Not Available for Our Present Needs."

He shook his head. "In the fidgeting face of such argiversation I can but observe that, really, of all

things! For, when one considers the persons whom you have elected to give a whole book to, civility must seek refuge in aposiopesis. Me, look you, me, you have passed over in favor of a moonstruck Kennaston and of that fat little Woods widow!"

"The Author," I pleaded, "does not customarily explain why he elects to do anything."

"None the less, I am sure I would have made a most remunerative protagonist. My inconsistencies are amusing: my whimsies, although decorous, are flavorsome: my morals are, if not exactly beyond reproach—"

"Beyond hope, anyway," I suggested.

"—And, in short, I am inclined to think that, here again, the Author does not quite understand just what he is about."

"Upon my word," said I, "you touch a truth—"

"Each has his métier," the little man admitted, modestly. "The flea leaps well, most senators carry their liquor well, whereas the clergy, one deduces from the numerousness of their children—"

## § 2

"I mean," I interrupted, "that once you talked to me all through one fine spring night. It was about Romance you talked—"

"I remember," Charteris stated, with a grin. "I

can well remember how, in that terrible dawn, after all my lovely rhetoric, you thought I had been explaining how books ought to be written."

"Well, I do not think that now. I incline, rather, to think you were talking about man's attitude toward life and the universe. I am sure, though, that in all your speaking of books you left unsettled the question you raised a moment since, as to what the Author is about? For what reason, in fine, and with what reward in view, does any author write his books?"

"I voiced for you most plainly and mellifluously the principles of his economy—"

"Yes: I remember your high observations as to Villon and Marlowe. The artist, you argued, is unwilling to be wasted; and he alone manages—sometimes—to perpetuate himself where everybody else perishes. You were quite eloquent about the artist's immortality. Only, I remember too that, toward the end, you admitted a considerable distinction. In art, you cried, it may so happen that the thing which a man makes may endure to be misunderstood and gabbled over, but it is not the man himself. We retain—I am still paying you the handsome tribute of exact quotation,—we retain the *Iliad,* but oblivion has swallowed Homer so deep that many question if he ever existed at all."

Charteris replied with something of the hasty

affability appropriate to dealings with the insane. "Now, my dear man! the whole point was that the artist strives to make something which endures—"

"I know! You explained what he attempts to do: but you did not explain why he should want to do it. You did not explain what he gets out of it,—beyond suggesting, and then retracting the suggestion, that he aspires to a sort of terrestrial immortality. No, Charteris, you explained, in fine, nearly everything connected with books except why an author writes them."

He deliberated this. He said: "Oh, but I must have made that plain. I can most vividly remember elucidating every bit of the universe, and that rather important detail could not well have been ignored."

"Ignored or not, you left it unexplained."

And promptly Charteris settled back in his chair, intent to remedy this omission.

"The author, then, very much as I did, will under provocation become magniloquent, and will say this, that and the other. But every author's real reason for writing is that, if he did not write, he would be bored to death. He writes because—"

Here I stopped him. "No, Charteris! You are too fond of juggling phrases with no better end in view than to get pleasure from your own dexterity. And I happen to be in earnest. Some twenty years and more, you conceive, I have given over, together

with health and eyesight, to the writing of the Biography: and I am nowadays, however late in the game, quite honestly and not unnaturally concerned to find out why."

"So, then! at last, you sympathize with your reviewers!"

"It was well enough, in the beginning," I went on, "to listen to your Economist theories: and while you talked I could believe in them, almost. Your verbal jugglery, I do not question, would still have that effect. But the moment you have done talking, I can but come back to the blunt truth, unwillingly: the artist cannot ever by making a statue or a painting or a book—no matter how long the thing made may last,—immortalize himself. He would come a great deal nearer to perpetuating himself by begetting as many children as his natural forces and the frailty of his friends permitted—"

"Ah, the lewd Jurgen touch!" said Charteris, regretfully.

"—And it can in no way concern the artist, either for good or ill," I continued, "that something which he happened to make, endures after he has perished. No doubt, you could explain the contradiction in your argument: you slightly married men have learned how to explain everything. But, after all, this is an affair in which I want my own notions, not yours."

## § 3

"Let me have just one other book to live and talk in," Charteris said, "and I will explain the scope and aim of novel writing with such a grace and loveliness as never was! My notions have a freer wing than yours: and if you are obstinate about this, you will be encountering by and by that statement in the public prints. 'The author has here vainly endeavored to recapture the charm of his earlier *Beyond Life,* and when he speaks in his own person is by no means so amusing.' That, I forewarn you, will be the unanimous verdict."

"I do not altogether aim at being amusing. I want, rather, to wind up affairs by contriving an epilogue for the Biography."

He regarded me for some while: and I do not know how to indicate his kindly and rather commiserating pensiveness.

Presently he said: "But I forewarn you, too, that nobody is ever going to recognise the Biography as an actual fact. You may pretend to yourself, if you like, that all your writing is of this one human life reincarnated over and over again, in the flesh of Manuel's various descendants, and endlessly performing the same rôle in what is, at bottom, always the same comedy. The nearest anyone will ever come to agreement with you is to admit that you

have wasted time and pains in patching up a sort of genealogy; and that your books, in fact, are—if you think it a merit,—rather monotonously the same, because you are unable to draw any figure other than yourself in a more or less transparent masquerade."

"The charge of monotony—in that word's primal sense, which you might with profit look up in the dictionary,—I acknowledge, and even glory in. For, as you say, it is perhaps the main point of the Biography that it—and human life—present for all practical purposes the same comedy over and over again with each new generation."

"Ecclesiastes, I believe, commented on the same phenomenon. Still, if you want people to read more than one of your books—"

"Not my books," I amended, "but my one book, which is the Biography, and of which my various publications are chapters."

Charteris shrugged. "My dear fellow! I, in common with the remainder of mankind, refuse to admit the possibility of anybody's writing a book in nineteen volumes. It simply is not done."

"But," he was told, with stubborn modesty, "but I have done it. Anyhow, fifteen volumes—"

"Oh, no: you have merely written fifteen books. That is a quite different affair, which anyone could manage, given pen and ink and time and a sufficient

lack of consideration for one's fellows. The connection of these various books, I can assure you, is either forced or imagined: otherwise, they would be an affront to the rest of us."

"Of course," I conceded, a bit mollified, "of course, if you are putting the Biography upon a basis with Sir Thomas Browne's Relations Whose Truth We Fear—"

"I am putting, to the contrary, the author of the Biography," said Charteris, "into a phrase."

"And that phrase is—?"

Charteris grinned. "The author of *Jurgen.*"

"I begin already," I commented, "to dislike that phrase—"

"Nevertheless, you need never look to find yourself regarded as anything save the author of *Jurgen* and, just incidentally, of some other books. There, after all, my friend, the Tumble-bug has scored: and nobody, for the rest of your lifetime, will you ever hear speak of those other books except, more or less politely, to find fault with their likeness or their unlikeness to *Jurgen.* Either quality, as you perhaps have learned already, is equally to be deplored and shrugged over."

"As the subscriber to a clipping bureau," I admitted, "I have noticed the fact rather unavoidably. Any likeness to *Jurgen* is the tiresome reworking of

an exhausted vein: but any difference from *Jurgen* proves my exhausted abilities."

Again beneath his moustache his teeth showed. "So you remain, you see, the author of *Jurgen.*"

"Scott," I replied, "wrote *The Antiquary;* and Thackeray wrote *Henry Esmond;* and Dickens wrote *Our Mutual Friend:* yet people even to-day continue to think of them as the authors, severally, of *Ivanhoe* and *Vanity Fair* and *Pickwick Papers.* So I suppose that nothing can be done about it."

Charteris regarded me for a lengthened while. "I see: you have become stoically reconciled to having posterity go on thinking of you, for century after century, as merely the author of *Jurgen.*"

It may be that I flushed. "But, Charteris, I never said—"

And now his shoulders went up. "My dear man! as if you had to!"

§ 4

"Yet, in this epilogue at least," John Charteris went on, "you may, as it happens by rare good luck, hope to avoid the ephemeral—"

"Not utterly," I dissented. "In literary fields there are always so many May-flies about— But then, Charteris, I had thought to add footnotes which would explain all such allusions—"

"As may be incomprehensible to your readers of

a few hundred years hence? I see. Such carefulness must be granted to display a kindly heart, in an illuminating blaze of self-complacency. But I was in train to suggest, my friend, that you might avoid the ephemeral by rather different methods."

"As how?" I asked.

"By listening," replied Charteris, "to me, while I discourse of eternal verities. This happens to be one of my loquacious afternoons—"

And here I raised my hand, in utterly unheeded protest.

"—For you inform me that you need for this debatable Biography," John Charteris continued, "an epilogue,—which of course ought to be spoken by the same person who afforded the prologue. Well, I shall overlook your crass misrepresentation of me in that prologue, which you so ill-advisedly called *Beyond Life*. You will remember how many 'spiritualists' turned to it with fervor, and away from it with disgust? I, none the less, forgive: and off-hand, I would say—"

"No, Charteris! No, for I must myself contrive this epilogue—"

"But, dear man, I have it already complete, to the last paradox. It is in my mind now, hastening to the tip of my tongue—"

"No, Charteris, I will not hear you!"

"—Art, just as Schiller long ago perceived, is an

outcome of the human impulse to play, and to avoid tedium by using up such vigor as stays unemployed by the necessities of earning a living. The artist is life's playboy. The artist, to avert the threats of boredom, rather desperately makes sport with the universe—"

"It is a universe you are quitting—"

"—For, as you of course perceive, the literary artist plays: he does nothing else, except with haste and grudgingly: and the sole end of his endeavor is to divert himself—"

But I had shaped the Parting Sign of Ageus, which is interpreted variously, but whose efficacy does not vary. . . .

§ 5

I hated thus to despatch the little fellow, after we had played together for all of twenty-two years. Besides, his going was not alone. A great many others, I suspected, departed with him: and I fancied that if, rising, I now looked out of the library window as far as the Mill Road, I might see yonder,—passing now away from me, now that our commerce was over, and travelling in motley companionship through the gray spring weather,—all the various men and women whose lives I had fashioned for me to play with in my books. Heaven only knew, if Heaven imprudently concerned itself with such

matters, how many hundreds of them there must be. . . .

And now they were all gone, I turned to the task of getting down upon paper my notions as to the aims of my writing, and some explanation as to what I had been about during the years which I had given over to the compiling of the Biography of Dom Manuel's life. For the task approached completion: or, rather, the game drew toward its end; and that ending might well be the appropriate season for me to sit out, irrevocably, while the others played on.

However! once the Biography was really done, and once the volumes as yet accessible nowhere save in, as went my resources, that almost prohibitively priced Intended Edition, when these had been issued uniformly with the rest,—with the Kalki binding, and the usual number of misprints,—then I might or might not want to write something else. Or perhaps before that time came would come death. Time, either way, would settle the upshot without my aid. Meanwhile I most certainly wanted my epilogue, in the shape of a summing up which would explain, if only to me, just why I had been at pains to write this exceedingly long book,—which all other persons, whether obtusely or whether in self-protection, insisted upon regarding as *Jurgen* and several other books.

## § 6

And somehow, now that, comfortably replete with luncheon, I approach my epilogue, now it is in my mind to make verses rather than to discourse in sober and reasonable prose. But I lack any matter, too, that plainly prompts to versifying. So I somewhat vacantly consider the trees which stand about my library window. At this season they have put off their nakedness, but the green of their leaves has not yet come to its full volume. The leaves are sallow and infrequent. They dapple a luminous gray sky with much the effect of germs seen under a microscope. The grass in the long field beyond is pale and sodden: for I regard all this in a gray shining pause between the heavy spring rains. The world, in preparing to be very beautiful, is for the while disheveled looking: and it suggests to me, without any stepping stones of exact analogy, a handsome woman defamatorily clad in a shabby green dressing-gown, poised before her mirror, with her hair already partially loosened in order that she may prepare for a festival.

It is a fine festival for which the world makes ready. It is a pageant and a banqueting that will feed all the senses, and will last for months, until the white winds of November come, like gaunt janitors, to remove the furniture and decorations. Life every-

where will burgeon and exult, and bear fruit, and wane peacefully.

I mean not only grasses and bushes and trees. There will be a great barking of dogs, and cats also will make the warm night vocal. And birds too will cry out in the night, as if amazed and wistful, and that crying will be very piercingly sweet and, for no reason at all, pathetic. There will be lambs, and foals, and calves, with amateurishly constructed legs. And of course the young people— But I wonder about those young people! There is upon them a bland hard innocence, like the gloss of white china. It is slippery, and it ever so lightly chills. Yet it does seem, essentially, innocence. I recall, with a wealth of ancient instances, that my own generation, where it went unchaperoned, was remarkably unhampered by innocence: and I wonder if my own generation was like this in the presence of our elders? I do not remember; I feel that nobody could hope to remember a thing so far away: and it is in my mind to make verses.

For I remember many other matters that have to do with moonlight and with the touch of young flesh and with a lost consciousness of being fearless and eternal. Music too seems to be woven through the background of my memories, not as a thing quite noticed, but as not ever wholly absent. I remember, in fine, youth: and I know that the glad magic of

youth was always a promise of whose fulfillment one lived, then, utterly assured: and I suspect that to be old means merely coming to comprehend that this promise has not been, and never will be, kept. Meanwhile I observe it is still the nature of young persons to seek out quiet places in couples, and to evince no distaste for twilight: and I surmise that even those inexplicable automobiles which stand to the side of our country roads at evening and after nightfall have at least two persons inside them. These phenomena also are a portion of the premeditated festival, of that sublimely irrational festival whose *ducdamê* (as Jaques in the play, you will remember, calls that invocation which draws fools into a circle) is still the promise which all, by and by, perceive to stay eternally unfulfilled.

Now it is in my mind to make verses about this festival, but I lack any matter, here again, that plainly prompts to versifying. We older persons must sit out, sit out forever from this especial form of recreation, while others play on. We dare at most to attend as chaperons, and with a smile to observe these junketings: for Time, that stern old Roman, states outright (in of course his native tongue), *Lusisti satis!*

I do not say that we have not equally important things to do, in our traffic with affairs of the mind: I would not assert our utter readiness, as yet, for the

scrap-heap and the graven tributes of the stone-mason. I merely note that we are but, at best, the chaperons at this festival for which the April world is preparing. So we must look on benevolently, and must preserve decorum, and also must not ever concede what urge it is that prompts this festival. . . . Still, it is in my mind to make verses. . . .

## § 7

There is, though, I reflect, than this knack of sitting out at the right moment, and without sulkiness, from avocations for which the unfriendly years disqualify you, no finer, no more beneficent, and no more difficult art. To some, indeed, mere sitting out does not appear quite adequate: and there is much to be said for the contention that the key to real success in living is to die soon enough. Yet this is an un-American accomplishment: even our leaders rarely show the masterly tact of Lincoln; and the result is that most depressing list which begins with Benedict Arnold, continues with William Jennings Bryan and Aaron Burr, and so passes calamitously through the alphabet to Woodrow Wilson. There is no one of these transient inheritors of glory but has, through a mere faux-pas in longevity, impaired his chance of retaining eternal admiration and applause.

The writer, though, I think, is over-precipitate in dying at a day less than eighty. By that time he, with steadily failing faculties, will have published a deal of insufferable twaddle: but by that time, too, his name may well have become familiar to a fair number of ponderable and unliterary persons; and the excellence of his writing may be everywhere conceded as the obvious polite alternative to reading it. He has become in the cultural vista a known, not necessarily majestic, feature: he has won, in fine, to that certain undeniable assured position which no American artist anywhere can hope to secure except by prolonged survival of his talents. Longevity, indeed, is with us the one auctorial accomplishment which intelligent people can honestly esteem: we tend to share a generous national pride in all gifted persons who have painstakingly attained to our common level through the discomforts of senile decay. Time thus induces us to cherish our Longfellows and Bryants, and even to tolerate our Whitmans: it enables our Joseph Jeffersons to earn a competence upon the stage as soon as they have grown too feeble to act: and it has also persuaded us, through just this self-same sympathetic desire to gladden the last years of every striking case of mental indigence, to establish and stock our American Academy of Arts and Letters.

So I must certainly endeavor to live as long as

may prove possible. Even if I may not hope ever to be anything more than—in the phrase not utterly peculiar to John Charteris,—"the author of *Jurgen,*" there may be compensations by and by. And in fact, I turn here to thinking, with a pleasant warm thrill, about Mencken's prediction that, if I live to be eighty, I too may be elected to the American Academy. . . .

§ 8

None the less, now that I approach completion of the Biography, this may well be the time to sit out from the most high and joyous game of writing. The young are not merely at the door, they are in all the advertising columns devoted to the season's literary masterpieces, and behind most of the editorial desks. I, who was but four years ago a dangerous revolutionary upstart, begin, even among editors and publishers, to be treated with something of the gingerly respect with which one handles antique glassware or a veteran of the War Between the States. Among the really "vital" writers, still in strenuous practise of their lack of art, "the old fellow who wrote *Jurgen*" is relegated at best to the Middle or, as they playfully call it, the Muddle generation in American Letters; and I am become a relic vaguely associable with bicycles and hansom-

cabs and cigar-store Indians and cast-iron deer, and other coeval items of extinct Americana.

So it may well be time, once the Biography is quite complete, for me to sit out from the game of writing, and to make sport with words no more. And *Lusisti satis* has a dreary sound, at the first hearing: yet I do not know but that it is, in reality, the aptly worded praise of attested wisdom. "You have played enough!" I shall take it to mean that I have not stinted myself at playing, that I have got out of the writing all the diversion which is allowable.

For I begin to see fine implications in John Charteris' parting statement that the artist labors primarily, even solely, to divert himself. Whatever Schiller may have said remains to me unknown: but I find this theory, of art as play, in notoriously good standing elsewhere, among many; and I find, too, by the light of experience, a great deal in this notion that the artist—or, at least, the artist who happens to be a novelist,—is life's half-frightened playboy. . . .

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# I

# A NOTE ON ALCOVES

"Such is the present state of the world: and the nature of the animated beings which exist upon it, is hardly in any degree less worthy of our contemplation than its other features. Yet our first attention is justly due to Man, for whose sake all other things appear to have been produced by Nature; though with so great and severe penalties for the enjoyment of her bounteous gifts, that it is far from easy to determine whether she has proved to him a kind parent or a merciless stepmother."

# I.

## *A Note on Alcoves*

### § 9

"THE literary artist plays: and the sole end of his endeavor is to divert himself. . . ."

Seated now at my desk, I weighed the phrase. All valid artists in letters might or might not with justice be describable as life's half-frightened playboys. I, in any event, knew that, whatever other motives might now and then have prompted me, the Biography had been written in chief for my own diversion. Whenever people had unfavorably criticised my writing—I now perceived,—my first emotion had been, always, surprise at their imagining I had especially tried to give pleasure to them. I had, instead, for nearly a quarter of a century, been trying with the Biography to divert myself. That might or might not be the correct principle upon which to write novels: it was most certainly a prin-

ciple to which I was committed in any justifying of the form and scope of the Biography.

So I tapped out upon my typewriter, first of all, as a self-obvious axiom, "The literary artist labors primarily to divert himself. . . ."

§ 10

It is surprising, though, what protean gifts a theme develops once you attempt to grapple with it. When I was just now moved to set down on paper my personal notions as to the form and scope and aim of the novel, as these notions are illustrated in the Biography, the affair seemed simple. With the task actually begun, the typewriter-bell may hardly tinkle thrice (for my machine is of a venerable model) before one sees that the guide to further composition must be that once celebrated chapter, in I forget whose Natural History, upon The Snakes of Iceland. It read, as you recall, "There are no snakes in Iceland." For one perceives that the form and scope of the novel, if not similarly non-existent, at least stay indeterminable in lands wherein the form and the scope of prose fiction stay limitless.

The aim, however, of the written, printed and formally labeled novel is, I take it, to divert. Such is (one may assume with in any event quite reputable backing) the only aim of creative writing, and of

all the arts. But much the same sort of diversion seems to be the purpose of a staggering number of human endeavors: and it is when one considers the novels which are not formally labeled, that the theme evasively assumes all manner of shapes, and the field of prose fiction is revealed as limitless.

I do not hunt paradox. I wish in real sincerity to acknowledge that our trade of novel writing and publishing is an ineffably minor evincement of the vast and pride-evoking truth, that human beings are wiser than reason. Pure reason—I mean, as pure as human reason assays,—reveals out of hand that the main course of daily living is part boredom, part active discomfort and fret, and, for the not inconsiderable rest, a blundering adherence to some standard derived from this or that hearsay. But human beings, in this one abnegation infinitely wise, here all discard the use of their reasoning powers, which are perhaps felt here to be at least as gullible as usual: and brave men cheerily deny their immersion in the futile muddle through which they toil lip-deep. . . . Pinned to the wall, the more truthful of flesh and blood may grant that this current afternoon does, by the merest coincidence, prove answerable to some such morbid and over-colored description by people bent on being "queer": but in the admitter's mind forgetfulness is already about its charitable censorship of the events of the morning, to the intent

that this amended account be placed on file with many expurgated editions of yesterday and the most brilliant romances about to-morrow. . . . For human memory and human optimism are adepts at the prevarications which everybody grasps, retails and tirelessly reiterates: these two it is who coin the fictions which every person weaves into the interminable extravaganza that he recites to himself as an accurate summing-up of his own past and future: and everywhere about this earth's revolving surface moves a circulating library of unwritten novels bound in cloth and haberdashery.

The wholesome effect of these novels is patent. It is thanks to this brace of indefatigable romancers, it is due to the lax grasp of memory and to the perennation of optimism, that nobody really needs to notice how the most of us, in unimportant fact, approach toward death through gray and monotonous corridors. Besides, one finds a number of colorful alcoves here and there, to be opened by intoxication or venery, by surrender to the invigorating lunacy of herd action, or even by mental concentration upon new dance-steps and the problems of chess and auction bridge. One blunders, indeed, into a rather handsome number of such alcoves which, when entered, temporarily shut out the rigidity and the only exit of the inescapable corridor. Life thus becomes for humankind a far different matter from

what it would seem to any merely reasonable creature, since life's monotonous main tenor is thus diversified by an endless series of slight distracting interests and of small but very often positive pleasures in the way of time-wasting and misdemeanor. And in addition, as we go, all sorts of merry tales are being interchanged, about what lies beyond the nearing door and the undertaker's little black bag.

## § 11

These are not, though, the only anæsthetics. The human maker of fiction furnishes yet other alcoves, whether with beautiful or shocking ideas, with many fancy-clutching toys that may divert the traveller's mind from dwelling on the prevalent tedium of his journey and the ambiguity of its end. I have not yet, of course, come to consideration of the formally labeled novel, for this much is true of every form of man-made fiction, whether it be concocted by poets or statesmen, by bishops in conclave or by advertisers in the back of magazines. And since memory and optimism, as has been said, are the archetypal Homer and St. John, the supreme and most altruistic of all deceivers, the omnipotent and undying masters of omnipresent fictive creation, their "methods" are in the main pursued by the great pair's epigoni; who likewise tend to deal with the

large deeds of superhuman persons seen through a glow of amber lucency, not wholly unakin to that of maple syrup.

Of the romances which make for business prosperity and religious revivals and wars to end war forever, here is no call to speak. Nor need I here point out that well-nigh everyone who anywhere writes prose to-day, whether it take form as a tax return or a magazine story or a letter beginning "My dear So-and-so," is consciously composing fiction: and in the spoken prose of schoolrooms and courts of law and social converse, I think, no candid person will deny that expediency and invention collaborate. It may be true that lies have short legs, but civilization advances upon them.

§ 12

I, in any event, get daily bewilderment from considering how deep-rooted seem all life's serious and practical endeavors in implausible fictions. The most long-headed of us, for instance, may reasonably confess to some faith in money and in mathematics: these things at least are stable realities, these are the pillars, the very Bohas and Jakin in the Temple of Common-Sense. And yet, here also, is disclosed by two minutes' consideration another side.

Money I regard, I hope, with all appropriate

gravity. I know that I now and then accept without derisory outcry, even thankfully, small metal disks disfigured with a remarkably unaquiline eagle and the fat-jowled head of a female criminal very neatly guillotined. Nor am I here deceived by appearances. These things suggest extremely rococo poker-chips, they look like counters to be used in playing some sort of game, for the sound reason that this is precisely what they are. And we play. We all play quite gravely, at every hour in our lives, at the game wherein these disks, which in themselves no mortal could regard with æsthetic pleasure or employ for any imaginable practical purpose, are supposed to be worth something. In time we get quite used to these horary excursions of fancy: and indeed we so enter into the spirit of the game as very often to "buy" things with a feeling that the clerk is swindling us, rather than we him.

But, as an even more remarkable fiction, I consider the new five-dollar bill which I chance this morning to possess. In itself, like the metal disks, it is worth nothing: and its glazed surface chills the thought of devoting it to the one use suggested by its general dimensions. It bears, though, I find, an engraved assurance that to the bearer of this paper the People's National Bank of Strasburg, Virginia, will pay five dollars.

Since, as it happens, the president and the cashier

of that institution have not signed in the spaces reserved for them, the assurance comes unsupported: for it nobody, so far as I can see, assumes any least responsibility. Yet, in any event, if the unsponsored statement be true, such is the sole value of this paper rectangle: its only virtue is that in Strasburg, Virginia, you can exchange it for five dollars.

I have no intention of going to Strasburg, Virginia: I shall instead buy something with this note, under the romantic pretence that the shopkeeper is going to exchange it, in Strasburg, Virginia, for five dollars. And he will part with it to somebody else on the same imaginative terms. And that make-believe will continue until this note is worn out. Meanwhile this bit of paper will gravely be exchanged, in varied surroundings, for every sort of commodity. . . . It will be transmuted into dinners, it will tread the pavements of remote outlandish cities in the form of a pair of shoes, and as pajamas it will pass beyond the proper scope of my meditations. It will flower into orchids, it will blaze as coal. Not without ostentation will it fall into the collection plate, nor toward Christmas flutter into the kettle of the Salvation Army: more furtively will it, thrice-folded, slip into the top of the feminine stocking. Darkness will sometimes engulf it like a pocket. Very deep will it descend, as fares the sewer rat, into grim social underworlds; as most inferior

whiskey it will be swallowed up; and in the manner of the dead that are laid away, will it go down into the steel catacombs beneath banking houses. Thence presently it will arise. It will arise unchanged, a trifle deteriorate in crispness perhaps, yet very potent to aid in lifting mortgages, in raising children, and in elevating many households, I would like to think, in the avatar of two of my books. . . . But never on any forenoon in Strasburg, Virginia, will it be exchanged for five dollars: and the one purpose for which this paper is so precisely designed is precisely the one to which it will not ever be put.

What will in point of fact become of it, I learn after serious inquiry into this mystery—in financial circles, wherein I was humored as a harmless lunatic,—is that, when the note gets sufficiently dirty and decrepit, "some bank will turn it in, at Washington," in exchange for a fresh paper rectangle; and the senior note will then be destroyed by Treasury employees. But nobody will ever convey to Strasburg, Virginia, this representation of Benjamin Harrison looking like a dishonest Santa Claus, and of the Pilgrims putting ashore at Plymouth Rock to investigate the phenomena of a wind that blows two ways and of a tree growing from the ocean. Nobody will ever deal logically with all this intricate engraving: and if anybody ever did, he would, as the very cream of this monetary fiction, be

thought "queer." At worst, his sanity would become a matter of medical investigation: at best, he would be given for this paper rectangle another banknote, and the romancing would now gild a different Carcassonne.

And similarly outrageous seem to any calm considering the fictions of mathematics. This fact, indeed, was recently pointed out to me by my small son, in whom his governess was endeavoring to implant the conviction that two and two make four. But the child stayed sceptical. He was reservedly polite about a rational "Suppose you had two apples, and I gave you two more apples, how many apples would you have then?" He conceded with readiness, not unflavored with resignation to the obtuseness of grown-up persons, that in such circumstances he would have four apples, but could not eat that many without being real sick. Yet that two and two, in consequence, make four, he excluded as a logical inference: and he depreciated that inference by stating it did not mean anything. He was, of course, quite right.

For that "two and two make four" becomes, the very instant that you play this familiar axiom the childish trick of thinking about it, at best an unprovable hypothesis. That two apples and two more apples compose four apples is, as my son admitted, plain enough. Or, you may change your unit to a

penny, a match, a pencil, or to a bungalow, and still produce convincing evidence to prove your arithmetic. But the mathematician requests us to consider an abstract "two," to believe in two apples with the pomaceousness removed: his incorporal and incorporeal "two" has never existed and never can exist. His "two" is not merely a fiction, but an inconceivable fiction which the human mind can no more, really, imagine than it can his "four." You need only for one moment attempt to form some rational and clear-cut idea of this "two" to perceive that the governess in fact was (with all respect to her) talking about incredible fictions, just as my son affirmed. . . . And when the mathematician goes on from "two" and "four" into the higher branches of his romance weaving, and postulates as yet other realities his "lines" that have length but no breadth or thickness, or his "points" that have not even length, you face the choice between fleeing from his self-evident lunacy and accepting his insane but very useful fictions.

§ 13

So do we all exist as if in a warm grateful bath, submerged and soothed by fiction. In contrast to the inhabitants of the Scilly Islands, who are reputed to have lived by taking in one another's washing, so do we live by interchanging tales that will not wash.

There seems to be no bound, no frontier trading-post appointed anywhere to this barter of current fiction, not in the future nor in the years behind. . . . Men have been, almost cynically, shown with what ease the romance which we call history may be recast throughout, now that America rejoices in an amended past which has all been painstakingly rewritten with more care of the King's English, and wherein the War of the Revolution takes its proper place as the latest addition to the list of German outrages. State legislatures dispose of man's arboreal ancestry by passing a law against it: and Congress, by bestowing upon non-intoxicating beverages an illegal alcoholic content, at once repeats and repudiates the miracle of Cana. Our newspapers continue the war-time economizing of intelligence, and still serve patriotic substitutes in serials, wherein Black and Yellow and Red perils keep colorful the outlook, and fiends oppose broad-minded seraphim in every political difference. Our clergy are no less prolific in their more futuristic school of art, and on every Sabbath morning discourse engagingly of paradise and of that millennium of which the arrival is at present being furthered by the more "modern" of our prelates bringing fearlessly to bear upon the mystery of the Incarnation the intellect of a midwife. . . . The past, the present and the future are thus everywhere presented in the terms of generally

diverting prose fictions: and life is rendered passable by our believing in those which are most to our especial liking.

§ 14

Man is, they say, the only animal that has reason; and so he must have also, if he is to stay sane, diversions to prevent his using it. Man, always nearing and always conscious of approaching death with its unpredictable sequel, and yet bored beyond sufferance by the routine of his daily living, must in this predicament have playthings to divert him from bringing pitiless reason to bear upon his dilemma: and he must have too the false values which he ascribes to these playthings.

The lines of Pope that I have quoted elsewhere dwell truthfully enough upon life's endless playing,—upon the playing of the child with straws and rattles, of the young man with his mistresses, of the mature with wealth and worldly honors, and of the aged with rosaries and prayer-books. But the solace, the true virtue, of these playthings arises from the fiction that the player tells to himself about them. No child plays with a straw: he brandishes a sword that has just chopped off a dragon's head. The young man, exultant, terrified, touches and uncovers, not an expanse of epidermis and small hairs and sweat glands, but the body of a goddess. The

banker is reveling in that romance about Strasburg, Virginia: and the aged clasp not a prayer-book but the key to eternal bliss. Everywhere, in fine, the creating romantic who lives in every human being is either composing or else borrowing the kind of romance which most potently diverts him, and prevents his going mad.

## § 15

Well, it is the privilege of the novelist—I mean, at last, the novelist who is frankly listed as such in Who's Who—to aid according to his abilities in this old world-wide effort, so to delude mankind that nobody from birth to death need ever really bother about his, upon the whole, unpromising situation in the flesh. It is the privilege of the novelist who happens also to be an artist, to blaze a trail upon which his readers may follow, and be delighted by the by-products of his hedonism. For it is his higher privilege to divert his own thoughts from unprofitable and rational worrying; and to lead such as may choose to follow him in one more desperate sortie from that ordered living and from the selves of which all men are tired.

So I suspect there must always be, to the last digit, precisely as many "methods" as there are novelists. For the endeavor of the novelist, even by the lowest

and most altruistic motives, is to tell untruths that will be diverting: and of their divertingness he needs, and in fact can have (prior to the receipt of royalty statements), no touchstone save only the response which these untruths evoke from him. His primary endeavor must therefore, upon merely rational and sordid grounds, be to divert, not any possible reader, but himself.

By the novelist who is more tradesman than artist, and who is guided by ideals rather than selfishness, this truth is not recognised: and he often commits the deadly error of succumbing to praiseworthy motives. He, as a rule, indeed, wrong-headedly begins by considering his public's real virtues and aspirations; he endeavors to strengthen these by finding for them vicarious exercise: and he thus allows himself to be misled into evanescence through philanthropy. Now it is the privilege of the public (which, to be sure, has an alternative) to consider the artist: but the artist who for one half second during his hours of play with ink and paper considers anybody except himself is contriving a suicide without dignity. For the one really ponderable sort of writer—the writer who communicates to us something of his own delight and interest in his playing, and who thus in the end contributes to our general human happiness,—has been influenced while about this playing by none save selfish considerations. He

has written wholly to divert himself: he has for that moment been inclavated to pleasure-seeking with somewhat the ruthlessness of a Nero and all the tenacity of a débutante: and if I seem unduly to emphasise this obvious fact, it is merely because the man afterward so often lies about it.

Some tale-tellers find themselves most readily bedrugged by yearning toward loveliness unknown and unobtainable: these are, we say, our romanticists. To them are, technically, opposed such Pollyannas among fiction writers as Mr. Theodore Dreiser and Mr. Sinclair Lewis, who can derive a species of obscure æsthetic comfort from considering persons even less pleasantly situated than themselves,—somewhat as a cabin passenger on a sinking ship might consider the poor devils in the steerage,—and so turn rhyparographer, and write "realism." The process is not unnatural, and has been more or less profitable since at least the time of Piræicus.

But, either way, the inspiring principle remains unchanged: you think of that which is above or below you in order to avoid thinking of what is about you. So it really does not greatly matter whether you travel with Marco Polo to Cathay or with the Kennicotts to Gopher Prairie. The excursion may be for the purpose of looking at beautiful things wistfully or at ugly things contemptuously: the point

is that it is an excursion from the place where you regard over-familiar things with a yawn.

When one considers these truisms,—and fails to see why they need be disputed by anybody not actually engaged in the physical labor of teaching or of contributing to the more successful periodicals,—then the form and scope of even the formally labeled novel seems, plainly, fluctuating and indeterminable. The novelist, it is apparent, will write in the form—with such dramatic, epic or lyric leanings as his taste dictates,—which he personally finds alluring: his rhythms will be such as caress his personal pair of ears: and the scope of his writing will be settled by what he personally does or does not find interesting. For the serious prose craftsman will write primarily to divert himself,—with a part thrifty but in the main a philanthropic underthought of handing on, at a fair price, the playthings and the games which he contrives, for the diversion of those with a like taste in anodynes. And to do this will content him. For he will believe that he may win to fame by brewing oblivion, he will hope to invent, if he prove thrice lucky, some quite new form of "let's pretend." But he will not believe that anybody with a valid claim to be considered a post-graduate child can gravely talk about affixing limits to the form and scope of that especial pastime.

§ 16

And so his "creed," to my experience, stays troublingly nebulous. At most he will admit but general tenets to himself, conceding very secretly:

Imprimis, I play, when all is said, with common-sense and piety, as my fellows appraise these matters, and with death also. I have embarked in a gaming in which to win is not possible: and every sensible person of course thinks this extremely foolish. Yet I know that, for my purpose, the opinions of all other persons are negligible. My own opinions, if indeed I have the patience and the temerity to unearth them, are, as I know also, erroneous; they are unstable: but they remain, none the less, the only reliable guides to my intended goal, diversion. . . . And my rational standards can be adhered to, I consider, with more safety if they are kept concealed.

Item, I must find out what are, in reality, my real beliefs: and I must set these forth to the best possible advantage; and I must be zealous, above all, not ever to regard my beliefs quite seriously. Human ideas are of positive worth in that they make fine playthings for the less obtuse of mankind. That seems to be the ultimate lean value of all human ideas, even of my ideas. I must carefully conceal my knowledge of this humiliating fact.

Item, I must cherish my ideas as I do my children, with a great love commingled with admitted inability to foresee what they may be like to-morrow. For my ideas and my impressions, in the moment that these visit and pass away from the consciousness which is I, from the fragment of consciousness which insecurely lurks inside this skull, are the only realities known to me in the brief while wherein I am, as yet, permitted to play with common-sense and piety and death. I will to enjoy and play with and, it may be, to perpetuate after my flickering from this skull, these true realities: if I succeed in perpetuating them, that is well; if I fail, I shall not at all worry about this failure once I am dead, and I am fairly certain to be dead by and by. At worst, the ability and the body and the life which transiently were at my disposal will have been really used, both to make something and to divert me. . . . And at best, it would be foolhardy not to keep such intentions concealed.

Item, with human life as a whole I have no grave concern, and I am beguiled by no notion of "depicting" it. My concern is solely with myself. I have no theory of what we call "life's" cause or object; nor can I detect in material existence any general trend. The stars and the continents, the mountains and these flustering hordes of men, every mole-hill and the diligent dancing of gnat swarms,—all ap-

pears to blend in a vagrant and very prettily tinted and generally amusing stream by which I too am swept onward. If but for my dignity's sake, I prefer to conceal my knowledge of this fact.

Item, there is upon me a resistless hunger to escape from use and wont: I seem more utterly resolved than are my fellows, not to be bored: and it is in my endeavor to evade the tediousness of familiar things that I am playing—playing, as I know, quite futilely,—with common-sense and piety and death. Such levity tends, it well may be, to no applaudable outcome: meanwhile this playing diverts me. . . . And meanwhile, my fellows being what they are, my amusement is a matter very profitably concealed.

Item, I really must, in the teeth of all solicitation, refuse to plagiarize anything from what people call "nature" and "real life." My playing, which I term my "art," has no concern with things which, in any case, are too ill-managed to merit imitation. For, still adhering to that simile of the prettily tinted stream, I am persuaded my art need not pretend to be a treatise upon hydrodynamics: my art is well content to be the autobiography of an unvalued straw adrift in this sparkling and babbling stream that hastens toward an unguessable ocean. Let us avoid guesswork, since it is profitless. Let us avoid, too, no reasonable pains to conceal this fact.

Item, let us avoid, also, the narcotizing perils of reverence,—even for our juniors, who are in all æsthetic matters invariably in the right,—or of being quite as serious about ourselves and our doings in collusion with printers and publishers as if mankind and the books of men were of grave and demonstrable importance. And let us, above all, avoid disastrous candors, and say boldly none of these things. Let us who "write" protest that we have no concealments, that we expose ourselves entire, and that our unselfish aim is to benefit and entertain other persons, the while that we play ceaselessly with common-sense and piety and death.

# II

# THE WAY OF WIZARDRY

"Such star-gazings show you indeed a bluer heaven and bigger stars and a sun rising out of the night: yet neither Athos will reveal to those who climb up to it, nor Olympos, so much extolled by the poets, in what way God cares for the human race, nor make plain the nature of virtue and of justice and temperance, unless the soul scans these matters narrowly; and the soul, if it engages on the task, pure and undefiled, will soar much higher than this summit of Caucasus."

## 2.

## *The Way of Wizardry*

### § 17

THE literary artist plays, I had said, with common-sense. . . . But here I harked back, compunctious. For only a moment since I had admitted that "travel with Marco Polo to Cathay" was, after all, not the sole end of our art: such romanticizing was merely one of the two avenues which, equally, afforded escape from the tediousness of familiar material surroundings. Yet it was the only avenue I was in train to recommend. And so I paused here to reflect that in the Biography I had always ignored the very real and solid claims of "realism."

Well, of that other method of escape, just indicated by my concession of the possibilities of "travel with the Kennicotts to Gopher Prairie"—of the type of diversion which is furnished by the "realist,"—I could but admit the existence and the potency, restricted, to be sure, to an unenvied class of minds;

and must so pass on, with no too obvious shuddering. "Realism" simply did not divert me, that was all: and thus in my mind ranked with dancing and The Literary Digest[1] and golf, as aberrancies of dullness that I could profitably avoid without reprehending. . . . Indeed, it had been my droll luck to have some pre-compository insight into the shaping of, if not the most notable, certainly the wideliest talked about, of this century's "realistic" novels; so that I still cherish a peculiar leniency for these Kennicotts whom I first met in manuscript; and I read their family history with a double sense of guilt. Here is the marriage I suggested between the schoolteacher and Ramie Wutherspoon: and I recall, with qualms describable as second cousins to remorse, that in a "realistic" novel no marriage can ever turn out really happily. Here, murdered by me, I am afraid, in the middle of another man's book, is the unoffending Scandinavian girl, Bea Sorgenson, who, but for my lethal intervention, might perhaps have thrived and have utilized the resources, and have educed the covert virtues and nobilities of Gopher Prairie, overlooked by the less practical heroine in chief; for this was to have been coincidently the story of Bea's success and of Carol's failure as an exponent of general social uplift: and would so have

[1] An American periodical of the day, designed to cure the habit of reading magazines.

converted the whole affair into a feminized and unreadable down-to-date version of the Idle and Industrious Apprentices. I might, I reflect with a troubled spirit, I might perhaps have here struck "realism" a shrewd blow by heartening Lewis in his first suicidal plan. . . . To the other side, here is Carol's technical virtue preserved unmarred, in the teeth of my lewd urgings: for I was resolute to have her fall from grace, duly escorted by Eric Valborg, and then to find that nothing whatever came of it. And here is not one of the suggested remedies for the Middle West's regrettable provincialism, of which, but for my protestations and scoffings upon bended knees, the reader might have had full benefit. I recall rather vaguely the nature, but vividly the great number, of these possible remedies which Lewis, once, planned to suggest: and I guiltily speculate if it would not have been the part of true kindliness, as well as of æsthetic morality, to have encouraged the launching of that avalanche of constructive criticism upon the unsuspecting reader of *Main Street.* He, paralyzed, engulfed, demolished, would probably not ever again, my conscience whispers, have opened another "realistic" novel. . . . At all events, I too had been in this matter of "realism" at least once, tinily, a *particeps criminis.* I confessed it, and resumed my epilogue.

For all this seemed remarkably remote from my

introductory remark about Marco Polo. I had in mind, then, not *The Travels of Marco Polo the Venetian,* but the small novel called *Messer Marco Polo* which Donn Byrne published now some years ago. And it is of this fiction that I wish here to speak more specifically, because of my personal involvement in its fortunes.

§ 18

Not often does one sustain the sense of having long awaited the book which time and chance and a kindred desire in another's being have combined to produce at last, and to make at last a vended commodity, as easy now to come by as blotting-paper or bad whiskey. I had this sense about *Messer Marco Polo.* It was, to me, the most delightful of surprises, a bit of unanticipatable flotsam washed up from the wide sunless sea of "realism." For we were, at just that time, being edified rather remorselessly. Sinclair Lewis had, via the book to which I have but now referred, detected several flaws in the cultural life of the Middle West; John Dos Passos had discovered that the Wilson War had been conducted not altogether as a pleasure trip for the private soldier; and Upton Sinclair was in his customary low spirits. Nobody, I think, could have looked for the coming of a *Messer Marco Polo*

through the auctorial welter,—whose susurrus was after all but a more literate, vast "Ain't it awful, Mabel?"—among those fretful waves of indignation over the dreariness of small-town life and the loneliness of the artist in this unappreciative country, and over how terribly our army swore in Flanders, and over the venality of our press and pulpit and every other institution, and (lone lisper of good yet to come) over the imminence of several more stupendous wars that would wipe out us and all our sordid existence. And yet, through these gray floods of portentous information (here neatly to round off my simile) floated this carved spar of loveliness, with absolutely startling irrelevance.

That *Messer Marco Polo* should have "happened" at this precise moment seemed a small miracle so pleasure-giving that I hastily waived all consideration as to the book's ultimate value. I only knew I had joyed in the reading of it, somewhat as the partially starved might rejoice in an unexpected windfall of savory food, without any need to deliberate the viands' durability.

None the less does the tale, some years after that first keen greedy gulping of its delights, and after a more leisured third reading, remain a very fine and beautiful strange book. I sincerely hope you are familiar with it: even if you are not, here is no need for me to summarize this tale of how young

Marco Polo, loitering through youth's amiable adulteries in thirteenth century Venice, became enamored, through report, of the Khan of Tartary's daughter, and of his adventuring as he crossed Asia to win to her. It suffices to report that here, in brief, we have a variant of the old high tale of Geoffrey Rudel and his Far Princess, adorned with very vivid, curious ornament, and brought to a dénouement no less sad but more soul-contenting.

Yet the essential thing about this book, I thought at my first reading, was its prodigality in the transforming magic which—heaven knows, in how few books!—quite incommunicably lends romantic beauty to this or that not necessarily unusual or fertile theme, somewhat as sunset tinges the wooded and the barren mountain with equal glamour. To me this book at once exposed Donn Byrne as a practitioner of that rare and unteachable wizardry without which one writes only words, and without which the most carefully made sentences tend but to bury one another like neat undertakers.

Technically, though, the construction of *Messer Marco Polo* must remain always to any novelist peculiarly interesting. To Mr. Byrne, in Westchester, N. Y., "at the second check of the hunt, came the message that a countryman and a clansman needed me," in the person of Malachi Campbell of the Long Glen: and it is the old Celt who tells

of what, in a far-off golden yesterday, Marco Polo the Venetian saw and encountered in Cataia. So then does Mr. Byrne set about his magicking, to lure you from the prosaic to the wonderful, at last to leave you contentedly cuddled in the lap of the incredible. He raises for you, to begin, the milieu of his Westchester,—"the late winter grass, sparse, scrofulous, the jerry-built bungalows, the lines of uncomely linen, the blatant advertising boards." It is in, seen through, and continuously colored by, this almost Gopher Prairean atmosphere that Malachi evokes the old time and the great plenty of Ireland in the days of her championship, and the gleaming world of tall Dermot and Granye of the Bright Breasts and amorous fierce Maeve and Cuchulain in whose heroic looks were love and fire; and evokes too, seen as if beyond and colored by the glow of this Celtic wonderland, not merely the opulent sleek life of the heyday and prime of Venice, "that for riches and treasures was the wonder of the world"; since past even that, illuminate and tinged by all, is evoked also the Venetian's notion of the inscrutable, good-tempered, shining, evil East.

The tale, thus, seems a fantastic and gracious pageant, saddened somehow by the known evanescence of its beauty, regarded through three opalescent veils: or, rather, all that happens—just as we upon reflection prefer to have had it happen,—in

the Chinese jasmine garden by the Lake of Cranes, is viewed through a rose-tinted gauze of mediæval fancies seen through thin aureate Celtic mists observed through the unhued but glazing window-panes of a Westchester, N. Y., drawing-room. I am by no means sure this curious tour de force was worth performing; but I am unshakably convinced that Mr. Byrne "brings it off" to a nicety.

Well, such was the romance which appeared some years ago without much heralding, and which, when I first read it, had existed as a book for a month or two without attracting any particular attention. And, reading, I wondered. For this tale, in itself delightful—for a reason to which I shall recur,—seemed to me to be told in words so "warm and colored," and so adroitly marshalled as to drive any honest-minded reader to the confessional. I confessed, then, to being uncritically seduced by the fact that Mr. Byrne, without apparent effort or shame, wrote perfectly of beautiful happenings and seemed no whit afraid of elaborated diction. I confessed to thinking that many of the episodes, perhaps most notably the efforts of Marco Polo to convert to Christianity the pagan girl who while he talks is merely conscious of the fact that she loves the talker, have a queer and heart-wringing loveliness that is well-nigh intolerable. And I confessed to finding the brief chapter which bridges seventeen years, and

winds up the story to "the true rhythm of life," a small masterpiece of art and wisdom.

Above all, I now confess this is the only contemporary book that ever I actually sought the privilege of reviewing. And when this task was entrusted to me, by The Nation, I indited every word of *Messer Marco Polo's* encomium with a teasing faint suspicion that I was almost certainly writing high-pitched nonsense which I would some day reread with embarrassment.

At all events, while the first rapture lasts, said I, let me profess that I most cordially admire this story, and seem to find no praise too exquisite. You, I advised potential readers, may derive from it a more temperate pleasure, you may not even enjoy what my more sophisticated juniors, I confess, are deprecating as "this pseudo-Celtic stuff": and, in fact, the tale can hardly appeal to any considerable audience, just now, since it "exposes" and "arraigns" nothing whatever. With that I had no concern. It was merely my affair to tell everybody who would listen that, to my finding, *Messer Marco Polo* was a very magically beautiful book.

## § 19

So I said all this in a review which I have here more or less exactly iterated. I count myself to-day

fortunate that this review achieved a brief bewildering sort of fame. Virtuosi thought well of it, it was quoted with approval by the literary editors of the leading papers of Des Moines and Walla Walla and Mobile. It seemed, indeed, to be reprinted illimitably in papers everywhere throughout the country, so that The Nation's honorarium but visited me in transit to the bank account of my clipping bureau. And the publishers reproduced this review at full length in their advertisements, and reproduced it, again virtually at full length, upon the novel's dust jacket. . . . I could open no periodical wherein reading-matter was advertised without encountering the proclamation, "James Branch Cabell says *Messer Marco Polo* is a very magically beautiful book." At first the phrase read like a ukase, it had the full and final ring of an imperial decree: later, with so constant repetition, it began to take on somehow the flavor of a taunt, and I would read on a bit further, in the next advertisement, hurriedly. . . . And people wrote to me about my pæans, some to thank me for, as they put it, "discovering" the novel for them, and some of course to rebuke me as the member of a petty clique of assassins, atheists and tomb-defilers who combined thus shamelessly to puff one another's books. And in fine there was rarely seen so much bombilation over any one brief and not especially remarkable criticism, whose only striking

characteristics were the dubious ones of enthusiasm and sincerity.

But this to-do had the merit of drawing people's attention to *Messer Marco Polo* and of provoking people to read this small novel. And many thousands joyed in the reading of it, very much as I had done. For here again was the true formula and the hero with whom mankind peculiarly delights in imagination to identify itself,—the hero who wanders footloose and at adventure through lands which are to him and to the reader in nothing familiar. It is the formula of the *Odyssey,* the formula of picaresque romance, and of all fairy stories properly equipped with quests and an indomitable third prince. It is of course precisely the one formula which cannot ever lose its charm so long as men retain that frame of mind which seems coeval with recorded history, of being bored by the routine of their daily living. . . . And people also found in *Messer Marco Polo* just the quality I had ascribed to this book, the quality which I have vaguely indicated as wizardry.

## § 20

Wizardry is, we know, one of the very oldest of human avocations. . . . Yet I recall how my friend Richard Harrowby, of Montevideo, once told me that, to his mind, the most strange feature of

wizardry was the adroit consistency with which truth here has always been distorted or concealed. For it stays an indisputable fact, as Harrowby pointed out, that many persons still believe wizardry, in common with its sister branch of witchcraft, to have been a delusion; and that the majority of those who are wiser remain at considerable pains not actively to dispute this quite common belief. The art of censorship had, in fact, here achieved its oldest and capital triumph.

"Well, you," I admitted, "know more about such matters than I even pretend to. So far as I can judge, your friends the wizards have just emulated the family doctor and all business men, in their usual endeavors, to prolong life and to change less rare materials into gold. Their sagas, from the history of Geber to that of Cagliostro, present—in so far, anyhow, as the tale is formally told,—mighty dull and sordid reading: and each of these ancient fakirs would seem to have got little enough out of the powers and privileges of the mage who, in that jolly old sonorous phrase, holds in his left hand the branch of the blossoming almond, and in his right hand the clavicles of Solomon."

To which Harrowby replied quite gravely: "Cabell, you tempt me. You really should distinguish between wizards and sorcerers— But, no! I shall not voice any indiscretions. The day is not

yet come, I too concede, for wise persons to speak candidly about magic, though already, I believe, the day dawns."

His faith in that day is perennial, and at times rather pathetic. . . .

"For one thing, though," I urged him on, "I am ready to argue that, just on material grounds, much of the fabulous wonder-working which our long-headed fathers used to dismiss with a shrug, to-day is taking on a different aspect; and that it becomes increasingly difficult to reject as a popular delusion performances which our own senses note to the right and left of us every day."

"And what," asked Harrowby, "imply these rolling periods?"

"Well, I mean that, when I was younger, no intelligent person for one instant saw more than nonsense in the legend that Simon Magus had ridden visibly through the air in a winged car or that Apollonius of Tyana could be acquainted with remote events within a minute or two after they happened. Such old wives' tales were outgrown superstitions, and that was all there was to it. But to-day—"

"In this enlightened age," he suggested, with a small smile.

"—To-day, with the manufacture of aeroplanes ranking as a standardized business, and with radios

in every third home, these miracles, as you see for yourself, do not sound a bit remarkable. To-day, with one precaution, nobody need question that Pietro d'Apone actually did hold imprisoned, each in his separate mètal vase, seven spirits to instruct him audibly in astronomy, alchemy and philosophy, in painting, physic, poetry and music. The needful precaution is, of course, merely to call these vases phonographs."

"I see, I see," said Harrowby, quietly. He was still smiling, for some reason or another. "They were crystal vases, by the way. And they were not phonographs."

"Anyhow," I answered, in the dismissory large manner of Mrs. Nickleby, "the principle is the same. And beyond just such material suggestions I, for one, would not venture—"

"I think," Harrowby stated, "that you will very soon hear others going farther. Men begin to perceive, in a great many other ways, that for some two thousand years has existed covertly a vast fund of knowledge and philosophy and religious teaching, not necessarily at odds with the more popular tenets of Christendom, but not sharing anything with these tenets nor at all reverencing them."

To me this sounded interestingly insane. So I began, "But, why—?"

"It is, obviously, a fund which its inheritors have

been compelled to keep occult, through Christendom's set habit of arraigning and murdering out of hand all caught adherents to such irritating standards, as sorcerers."

"Indeed?" said I, with a pleasant consciousness of now having him nicely started.

"Men are beginning," Harrowby continued, "to discover piecemeal by 'scientific' methods something of that knowledge which sorcerers, as ignoramuses call them, have since time's youth attained through rather different avenues. And more and more widely is the fact becoming recognized that sorcery and witchcraft and magic were as far from being popular delusions as they were remote from being implicated with Christian mythology, to the imputed extent of siding with the devil against Heaven."

"You don't tell me!" I observed.

But he did. He went on to tell me, in fact, a great deal more. For here, he told me, is a religion really old: and to its adherents that faith which came out of Nazareth seems still, they say, an upstart affair which may yet prove ephemeral. So the devotees of that elder faith have not ever really concerned themselves with Christianity, not even those of them who have, for one reason or another, become bishops and cardinals and popes. There had been, in the outcome of this indifference, Dick Harrowby considered, something of irony: and it was droll

enough to reflect that the supreme head of the Christian church—as when Gerbert of Aurillac, Hildebrand, Felice Peretti, Benedict Cajetan or Jacques d'Euse was pope,—had so often been the devout practitioner of an unspeakably more ancient religion.

So Harrowby talked on, with that rapt gravity which the old fellow reserves for discussion of "the occult": and I listened, in part almost believing him, who knew so much more about such matters than did I, and in part reflecting that sanity and insanity are, at best, elastic terms. . . .

## § 21

But now I listened more attentively: for Harrowby had gone on to suggest that theories now endemic among the miscellaneous gentry whom we inclose in the term "scientists"—these "new" theories as to a fourth dimension,—begin to-day to enable us to see much more than nonsense in that reiterated ageless whispering as to men who had sought and through the aid of magic had found their diversion in lands not formally set down on any map.

"You mean—?" I prompted him.

Well, it developed, he meant that certain travellers, this whispering has always reported, had been

to very queer places. And returning, they had told discreetly of realms wherein living was much more satisfactorily conducted than in our workaday existence.

"Yes, but," I commented, "even so—" I spoke just as a conversational spur, just as a dubious provocative: and Harrowby went on.

One traveller had been down into a twilit country where the people were small and flaxen-haired, and ate neither fish nor flesh of any kind. These people, he reported, wore brown caps to which were fastened little silver bells. Their country knew no sunlight, but was radiant with the shining of what, to the eye, seemed diamonds and carbuncles: and nothing noxious nor hurtful was to be found anywhere in this covert lovely land.

"Still—!" I observed.

Another spoke of a hollow mountain, wherein you entered to unending delights. And he spoke, spoke as if he were troubled, of the queen of this place. Yes, she was different from other women. And he talked too of the great Emperor Karl, and of giants and dwarfs, and of the Wildefrauen, who were more beautiful than the wives and daughters of men.

"Nevertheless—" I stated. But Harrowby was in full cry.

So he went on to tell me how yet another spoke

of a palace which was builded, so far as human sense might judge, of pink seashells and of crystal. A woman was to be encountered there also, very lovely in a robe of green: her eyes were intent and changeless: her black hair was interwoven with red coral. To her postulants she served, in a hall hung with pearls, eight kinds of wine in as many goblets of chased silver: and then with a gold frying-pan she prepared the velladen of fish, which was the marriage feast.

A fourth told of a quite different palace that was designed by the apostle Thomas; and was builded of Sethym wood and sardius and imperishable ebony and ivory and onyx; and was enwrought with the horns of reptiles. Before this palace stood a mirror to which you ascended upon a stairway of porphyry and serpentine: armed warriors guarded it night and day, for in this mirror you beheld all that was taking place in every province and region subject to the master of this palace: and within this palace you lived among all manner of pleasures and delights.

And yet another spoke of an untroubled and great-hearted people ruled by one that had not the appearance of a human being. Some said the real name of this ruler was Aradia: others boasted of large reason to believe the lord of the hidden city of Mommur in everything male. This monarch retained among mankind many secret worshippers,

marked with the sign of their service: these worshippers had privileges: and in the eye of each one of them, when you looked closely, you would find the small likeness of a horse.

Then also men had been to Blath Annis, and to the Strembölglings, and to a secret country among mountains wherein the lost tribes of Israel awaited the coming of Anti-Christ, when a fox would liberate them; and to the pleasant uplands of Ladaria, about which rolled perpetually, with terrible reverberations, a river not of water but of great stones; and to bright Audela, to which the very brave might enter through a gateway of fire, and no man could enter except in that way. Whereas yet other travellers had journeyed beyond Mistorak and the dreadful trumpets and thunder-blasts of the Vale of the Devil's Head, and had so won to the happy Isle of Bragman—

"But they came back," I suggested, at this point.

Yes, all had perforce returned to man's colorless workaday life, to the tediousness of over-familiar things, and to the ever-nearing shadow of death. Yet here and there, and now and then, some men had managed to enter into quite other ways of living. Men had in journeying toward death contrived—sometimes by chance, more frequently by the aid of magic,—for a while to elude the laws of ordinary human life, and for a while to divert themselves—

"In alcoves," I suggested.

"Yes, if you like," said Harrowby,—"in alcoves in which the laws of human polity and of material nature, as we know them, had not any jurisdiction. The point is that these tales were obviously not invented by liars with the intention of deceiving their hearers. For these tales, encountered in every part of the world, have never made the tiniest concession to plausibility: instead of wooing, they summons faith with the abruptness of a sheriff; and have assumed from the first that all our best-thought-of theories about the universe are comparable, let us say, to the knowledge which a fly in a dining-car possesses as to the management of railways."

"I see," I stated, comfortably. "Men, it was whispered, had, for however brief a while, escaped from the obligations and restraints and, above all, from the tediousness of workaday life,—that tediousness which people have always tried to vary and color, under every sort of human civilization, with so many forms of fiction. I see. . . . Yes, Harrowby, I see: and your insanity is really a great help to me."

"But," he began, "you have the ladder of seven metals, and you know perfectly well the secret of the mirror and the pigeons—"

"That," I protested, "isn't the point! . . ."

For I was in fact not at all concerned with the

exact amount of truth upon which these legends were based. The point, with me, was that men had since time's beginning wanted such tales to be true; and that these stories illustrated man's immemorial and universal desire to escape from the self-imposed routine of his daily life. Man had always believed that he could do this by the aid of wizardry: and in this belief, as I now saw, he had been always and perfectly right.

§ 22

For everywhere, of course,—to-day, just as in Homer's nonage,—this need is contented by the literary artist. The literary artist—he, in any event, —does actually fulfil this universal desire, by his own especial wizardry. He temporarily endows his followers with the illusion of possessing what all alchemists have sought,—unfading youth, wealth and eternal life. He engineers the escape for which men have always longed, and which they have always known to be attainable, as here, by magic. And his is the charitable miracle-working which enables you to figure enviably in unfamiliar surroundings. Through his kind thaumaturgy you, as Odysseus, deal intrepidly with cyclopes and ascend the ivory beds of goddesses; as Job you get, from any ethical standpoint, decidedly the better of the Lord God of Hosts and reduce Him to rhetorical bullying; as the

third prince you overpass all perils to win to the desired trinket; and as Christian you with a deadly thrust superbly discomfit lion-mouthed, bat-winged Apollyon. It is in this fashion that the artist makes sport with the first of his three adversaries, and derides common-sense.

For common-sense tempts men to be contented with their lot, to get the most from what is theirs, and not to hanker nonsensically after the unattainable. At the elbow of each of us lurks always this enchantress, with luring rhapsodies, more treacherous than ever any siren lilted, in praise of the firm worth of money and conformity. "Let us be rational," she whispers; "and let us remember that, whatever we might prefer, in this world two and two make four." And with many gaudy enticements does she prompt the unwary to yield homage to her insensate paramour, the doltish and vain idol of mathematics. . . . Thus tirelessly, thus unabashedly, does common-sense urge every man to obtain in this world, such as it is, the permitted uttermost from that life which stays peculiarly his own: and to the wheedling solicitings of common-sense the literary artist can answer but one word. That word is "Bosh!" And having uttered it, the artist proceeds to divert himself by living dozens upon dozens of lives which in nothing resemble the starveling and

inadequate existence allotted him by the mere accident of birth.

§ 23

Yes: the creative romanticist alone can engineer a satisfying evasion of that daily workaday life which is to every man abhorrent. I am convinced, upon several grounds, that the motive of the literary artist is wholly unaltruistic: he blazes for his own pleasuring the trail upon which any number of readers may, so far as he cares, follow or not follow, just as they elect, and be hanged to them! Whenever he journeys into some such improbable country as, let us say, Poictesme, it is, I know, for his own recreation. But I choose here, entirely from the viewpoint of a reader of books, to consider with less scrutiny his selfishness than my firm grounds for gratitude.

For, thanks to these haphazard sorcerers, my life has been a marvellous affair. I look back, for example, upon the last month, which, as my high-flown and roystering way of living averages, has been uneventful enough. Yet in that time, I have quested through Thessaly, disguised by the old magic of Apuleius as Mr. Gilbert Seldes, in pursuit of all the lively arts, and, somewhat more necessitously, of a wreath of roses; and have, with an intrepidity

which I perforce admired, sailed for the moon, to take part in the wars between Endymion and Phaëthon. . . . Descending, I have passed that night with a fair and charming woman—in a bed very white and wide, with two coverlets of scarlet silk cloth,—and all our queer intercourse has been conducted, amid many other incomprehensible happenings, chastely. In the morning we two went out into sunlit fields; and so came to a spring of clear water enclosed by a stone basin, upon which someone had left forgotten a comb of gilded ivory. Entangled in this comb, as I (whom men called Lancelot) saw with glad wondering, and with the heroic passion for which I had long suspected myself to have the talent, was near a handful of the hair of Guenevere. And I remember how I thought that gold a hundred thousand times refined would seem darker than midnight compared with the brightest day of that year's summer, if anyone were to set such gold beside this hair. . . . Soon passing thence,—and travelling now under the alias of Gil Blas de Santillane,—I have disastrously changed rings with a plump, dimpled brown-eyed niece of the governor of the Philippine Islands; I have come, disguised as a green and gold pasteboard dragon, into the bedroom of the most beautiful of Casmirians; I have criticised the sermons of the Archbishop of Granada and found him in nothing dif-

ferent from any other author under criticism. Fleeing episcopal wrath, I chatted, near Plessis les Tours, with a thin-nosed and threadbare burgess, who turned out to be the most shrewd of kings, and who sent me perilously journeying to the court of yet another bishop. But Louis de Bourbon had been murdered, I discovered, at an over-uproarious supper-party conducted by the Wild Boar of Ardennes. . . . So I journeyed instead into England, to fetch back the Queen's diamonds in good time for her to foil the nefarious Cardinal, by duly wearing these twelve gems when she danced in the ballet of La Merlaison at the fête of Messieurs the Echevins. In England, though, I wandered so far astray, both northward and chronologically, that, lost, I paused, under the wood of Lettermore, to ask my way of red Colin Campbell, in the very moment the great, ruddy jovial gentleman was shot down from ambush; and through this mishap I became again a fugitive, now wandering through the howes and bracken of wild Scotland. . . . Always, you perceive, no matter what mage guided, he kept to the tried formula, and led me, footloose and at free adventure, through eras and surroundings which were to him and me in nothing familiar. . . . So that eventually I came, by way of the British Linen Company's bank, and so past the lair of Tharagavverug, to the steel gate, to The Porte Resonant, of the Fortress Unvanquishable;

and I am now upon the point of going in to cut off, for the third or fourth time, Gaznak's evil head.

Yes, looking back, I can see that the last month has been fairly various and contenting. And I am convinced that I must owe all these happy adventurings to the charity of beneficent wizards rather than of mere writing persons. And I elect to think of each and every valid romantic novelist as a skilled sorcerer who, accompanied by a suitable cortège of readers, departs at will from the workaday world, to travel, eternally young and always comfortably opulent, upon the blessed way of wizardry which conducts him away from boredom, and enables him to wander footloose and at continuous unflagging adventure, in unfamiliar lands wherein, as Poictesme phrases it, almost anything is rather more than likely to happen.

§ 24

And I would like to think that every self-respecting novelist goes to his magicking in suitable estate, and follows high and approved old formulæ. In any event, so many persons have, at odd times, inquired about my own "methods" of composition that it seems well here to jot down what would appear to be a few of the more obvious rules of thumb.

The novelist, then, most appropriately prologizes his evasion of common-sense—after of course per-

forming the proper suffumigations of camphor and aloes and amber,—by writing his first chapter in a robe of white, with a triple collar of crystals and pearls and selenite. His diet upon this day will be fish. When there is fighting in manuscript, the writer may always advantageously, I believe, shift to a rust-colored robe adorned with amethysts, and having a belt and bracelets of steel,—clothed in which gear, he will while writing keep as near as circumstances permit to the chimney, favored by Mars. When he is about to kill anyone scriptorially, he will in mere self-protection put on a wreath of ash and cypress, and burn scammony and alum. He will likewise upon this day be careful to stint none of the functions of nature; and will circumspectly remember that he traffics with the wan and ashy overlord of the greater infortune.

But to bring off a love scene properly, demands of course much more elaborate paraphernalia. The room, so far as general experience indicates, should be hung with green and rose; the author, whom a Nubian mute is fanning with swans' down, now is robed in sky blue, and wears a graven turquoise ring. Musicians are in attendance, preferably choristers, fiddlers and pipers. Upon the writer's head is a tiara of lapis lazuli and beryl, wreathed about with myrtle and roses: upon the auctorial breast a copper talisman opposes to the busied keys of the

typewriter the mystic sign of Anael and the inscription AVEEVA VADELILITH. . . .

I do not mean that in writing the Biography I myself have always in every detail followed these exact "methods" of composition. What with one thing and another, such as having small children in the house, a similar account at the bank, and the attendance within candid conversational range of one who holds at best the customary views as to what may be put up with in a husband,—with such deterrents about, these "methods" have sometimes, in some respects, been found inexpedient. And so I merely suggest them here as that ideal of conduct which should be aimed at by the creating romanticist, in absolute and strict logic. For he in reality is a sorcerer, and in consequence is amenable to the most ancient of rules.

# III

# MINIONS OF THE MOON

"Schiller's *Räuber* perverted the taste and imagination of all young men. The high-minded, metaphysical thief, its hero, was so warmly admired that many raw students abandoned their homes and betook themselves to the forests to levy contributions upon travellers. But they found that real, everyday robbers were unlike the banditti of the stage; and that three months in prison was very well to read about by their own firesides, but not agreeable to undergo in their own proper persons."

## 3.

## *Minions of the Moon*

### § 25

THE literary artist plays, I had said, with piety. . . . But here I was pleasantly interrupted by the sun's appearance without, and the consequent inrush of new color and of livelier gilding into the massed bindings of those books, of so many more books than I shall ever accord a second reading, assembled upon my library shelves. Everything had of a sudden brightened, with a cheerfulness which my thinking absorbed, since (even with that awkward question of piety ahead) I had found at least one excellent palliation for the devoting of my life to the Biography. For the novelist and every creative writer travelled on the gay way of wizardry while his less favored fellows, for the major part of their journeying, approached toward death through more staid and monotonous corridors.

Yet in these corridors men were continually find-

ing alcoves: and these alcoves, as reflection had already suggested, were of two sorts. Men found solace in—to continue my figure,—alcoves of useless or even of reprehensible action; and in alcoves of thought. By the rogue, and by the rather rarer addict of mental exercise, might, at reasonable intervals, diversion be obtained as we passed toward the exit at the end of the inescapable corridor. . . .

Well, and as I continued idly to regard my books, I noted in particular two volumes which yet stood side by side. Their appearance in America had been, I recollected, contemporaneous. And these two relatively enfranchised types of men—the thinker and the rogue,—had then been, I considered, afforded exoteric illustration, by that most quaint of accidents which gave us simultaneously as published books *The Education of Henry Adams* and *The Legend of the Glorious Adventures of Tyl Ulenspiegel.* I could remember thinking that not often were thus coincidently granted, for the first time to Americans, two volumes with such a plausible air of being destined for longevity,—although the cautious would affix to the making of this assertion the rider that each book centres on a personality which is by way of being unfairly beguiling. Each protagonist here is a personality evocative of the reader's friendship, in the instant happy way in which people between book-covers are privileged to establish such relation-

ship with beings less permanently issued in flesh; and so each of these two evades calm judgment. For to many of us these had figured at once as new-found, heart-delighting and eminently "personal" friends,—this Ulenspiegel come a-swaggering out of Belgium, and this wistful Adams then just released from the decent reticences of living,—and we perforce appraised them with a bias of friendship rather than by any code of strictly "literary" values.

Still, the two figures appeared quite perfectly to illustrate the seeking of diversion in alcoves of reverie and of misdemeanor. To Adams I decided to come back: and to the Fleming I turned with frank confession that of the somewhat incongruous pair one finds Tyl Ulenspiegel the more difficult to judge with any pretence of equity, precisely because this Tyl is, as I suggested at the beginning, a rogue. . . .

§ 26

It would be pleasant here to digress into speculation why in our literature there should be so few rogues portrayed full-length; and why America, that in daily life derives such naïve pleasure from being cheated by "fine business men" and "far-seeing statesmen" should have produced in its writings no really memorable rogue, with the possible exception of Uncle Remus's Br'er Rabbit. But upon the

whole, it appears preferable to say that Tyl Ulenspiegel has been for some five centuries famous among the people of Belgium and the Netherlands as a sort of Dutch Figaro or Scapin,—as "mischief-maker, jack-of-all-trades, and by turns fool, artist, valet and physician." This character was appropriated and ennobled by Charles de Coster as the central figure of a heroic romance, *La Légende de Tiel Uylenspiegel,* published in 1867, and since known as "the Bible of the Flemings"; and it is this book which was, some fifty years afterward, translated into our tongue. So much it appears preferable to say as simply as possible, because, in Geoffrey Whitworth's translation, a splendid and great-hearted example of literary art was then rendered into delightfully adequate English: and I incline to think that a masterpiece should be greeted simply and reverently, and without vain speaking. Even to recommend it to your consideration (as I none the less must conscientiously do) seems rather on a par with saying pleasant things about a sunrise.

So honest comment can but come back to this: for Tyl Ulenspiegel himself one straightway establishes a sort of personal liking, a liking unbased on "literary" values, and an unmoralizing liking such as entraps you into indignation when the reforming

Henry the Fifth repudiates that other not-unlovable rogue, Sir John Falstaff.

"A Fleming am I from the lovely land of Flanders, workingman, nobleman, all in one,—and I go wandering through the world, praising things beautiful and good, but boldly making fun of foolishness." Such is Tyl Ulenspiegel's description of himself, in terms a bit over-modestly incommensurate to the speaker's variousness. Tyl can, for example, be upon occasion a very pretty fighting-man, performing salutary homicides with an approach to professional despatch and thoroughness. For so often as a national hero finds a deserving person to be rescued from oppression, ten or twelve adversaries amount, as we sometimes discontentedly foreknow, to nothing more than to afford, in the moment that their presumption procures for them demolishment, yet another proof of the foolishness of the wicked; and all such slight battues the national hero regards as trifles. Thus here, for serious work, an Ulenspiegel too requires some three or four fully armed opposing cohorts of Spanish cavalry to be discomfited single-handed, and really to justify a display of that animation with which Sieur Roland laid about him at Roncesvaux, and which enabled Achilles to choke Scamander with slain Trojans.

So much of physical prowess, I repeat, one has the

fair and ancient right to expect of any national hero. Quite another facet of the jewel is the roguish, not at all "heroic" Tyl of elder legends, who delights in perpetrating jokes not always pre-eminent for delicacy. These thimble-rigging and cloacinal jeux d'esprit De Coster, to be sure, has for the most part omitted, with here and there just a bland indication. For another matter, although Tyl is devotedly attached to the fair Nele, and their marriage at the end of his wanderings is a conclusion such as the erudite describe as foregone, nobody can expect a rogue meticulously to emulate Joseph. The national hero of Belgium, be it repeated, is a rogue. . . . So there came about inevitably that affair of the beautiful gay-hearted dame whom Tyl escorted to Dudzeel: in all her dealings with young men, howsoever impudent, she abhorred in particular the sin of cruelty, and could not be pricked into it. And there was the Walloon maiden into whose home Tyl went one night, to take part in organ practise of the right accompaniment to some Flemish love-songs. And there was the Comtesse de Meghen, another lovely and benevolent lady, who offered Ulenspiegel, in the beginning, hospitality, and in the end, her sincerest compliments upon the fact that he did not in anything resemble her elderly and flabby husband. . . . In fine, Tyl Ulenspiegel marches, in the pride of his youth, about a world of brightly-colored and gen-

erous women, and graces a world wherein he displays as much continence as appears consistent with politeness; and wherein Joseph in the final outcome could not manage to combine these two virtues.

So likewise this rogue marches, with chance for guide, about a world which—then also,—was ruled by folly and bigotry; and he goes with jauntiness, as befits "a master of the merry words and frolics of youth," even in the shadowed places where overhead his betrayed and gibbeted kindred fester between him and the sun. His is Hamlet's heritage, but the Fleming wears his rue with a marked difference; since the ashes of a martyred father lie upon Tyl's breast without at all oppressing a heart whose core is roguishness. And in the presence of injustice Tyl Ulenspiegel does not shrink, not even into drawing morals: instead, with chance for guide, he marches. For those who would wrong him his eye and tongue and sword stay keen; and the rogue knows these weapons to be in the long run sufficient: meanwhile, that one should now and then encounter over-troublesome fellows needing to be killed, is as naturally a part of wandering at adventure as that one should find everywhere girls to be assisted out of virginity and flagons to be emptied, and songs to be made beyond any numbering, but never the last song. . . . So the rogue marches, and puts all

things to their proper uses. And the heart of the reader, given something better than the heart of a flea, goes out to the resistless rogue.

There is, to be sure, a "story": in fact, around this sprightly figure De Coster has woven—contemporaneously, it is bewildering to reflect, with the weaving of a dreary mystery about one Edwin Drood,—an intricate romance as cruel as life and considerably gayer. Somewhat to deviate metaphorically, De Coster, in this tale of fifteenth-century Flemings in course of being enlightened and uplifted by the auto-da-fés and hangmen of the Holy Inquisition, has builded a story which is not unsuggestive of a time-mellowed fifteenth-century cathedral; with the gentry about their devotions, and with peasants joking on the porches, and with a stately hymn music accompanying both the aspiration and the guffaws; a cathedral, too, that is no less opulent in glowing paintings of rapt saints and archangels than in captivatingly hideous gargoyles. . . . Here again, one is tempted to expatiate, concerning these gargoyles: and I would like here to talk about the superlunar bleak buffooneries of the chapter which depicts the death of Charles the Fifth, and his trial in heaven; or to applaud the account of Tyl's hunting of the werwolf; or, at least, to note that really intolerable "catharsis by pity and terror" when Katheline the good witch attempts to

share her cup of cold water with Joos Damman in the torture chamber. . . .

## § 27

But what, above all, remains with us is the figure of the tall young rogue who passes hardly any alcove which hide-bound morality has labelled "Keep Out" without a little dalliance therein. Ahead is a closed door, lightly ajar, a black door with silver-plated handles, which one perforce approaches always: in the meantime it is astonishing to note what a number of pleasant and blameworthy things one can discover to do.

Reflection finds the circumstance unfortunate that most of the agreeable actions of life are either forbidden or else deplorably behedged with restrictions. From drunkenness and from the effects of certain drugs can be obtained moments, and even hours, of conscious contentment: probably in no other way, indeed, is it possible for human beings to induce an unbroken twenty minutes of actual and complete happiness: but with repetition such pleasures increasingly work the deuce of a damage to one's health and purse. Besides, our inefficient bodies prove unable to stay comfortably inebriate, for more than a brief while, without drifting into sleep or collaps-

ing in sickness: and our equally inefficient medicine men have found out no amiable method of, in the time-honored phrase, recuperating from alcoholic excesses.

Then also the more intimate recreations of amour, when once you are over with the disappointments unavoidably attendant upon loss of innocence, compose a very pleasant pastime so long as the game is played by relative strangers. Even superficial exploration of the charms and the little ways of any unfamiliar and personable young woman, they tell me, is unflaggingly rewarded and incited to fresh exertions by the discovery of some slight novelty or small strangeness. Thighs differ, breasts are always unpredictable, and the piquant mole continually "by himself surprises," I am informed. Yet, in America at all events, one finds extant a perceptible tendency to deprive the oldest and most popular of amusements of just this essential element of unfamiliarity, by restricting it to married persons; and even within this licensed class to limit each husband to the embraces of his own wife. Now with the morality of this social ruling the most precise need pick no fault: I would merely point out that, here again, should monogamy ever become prevalent among us, we would be deliberately abating one of the more considerable pleasures of an existence wherein pleasures are not over-frequent.

Nor, of course, not even in actual need, are you allowed to take another person's money away from him except through the tedious channels of business; nor to fare publicly appareled in lovely colors except just where your necktie shows but stays invisible to—of all people—you alone; nor are you permitted to keep enjoyable, through the amenities of homicide, your commerce with persons who admittedly exist but to annoy their fellows. Tyl Ulenspiegel might deal as the whim took him with those obnoxious cohorts of Spanish cavalry. But with us there is never an open season for religious revivalists or book peddlers or collectors of internal revenue: and traffic policemen and the conductors of "tag-days" [1] and prohibition agents all live in exasperating immunity. Even the women you adored, and wrote letters to, approach you intrepidly. Everywhere, in fine, this or that pleasant action is forbidden or in one way or another restricted; and man, upon the verge of actual, sharp, zestful enjoyment is brought up short by a taboo of his own inventing.

So it is pleasant—*faute de mieux,* as in our current fiction superb worldlings no longer observe to other members of the *élite,*—it is very pleasant to

[1] The reference is to a then prevalent form of brigandage and blackmail practised by the females of the smaller American cities, by which reputable women also were permitted to "accost" and to exercise all the other street privileges of strumpets.

indulge in these sports vicariously through considering the exploits of the Ulenspiegelian rogue who does do these things. And we cannot but rather fondly admire the dashing fellow who commits the pleasure-giving misdemeanors from which we are held back by prudence or by physical limitations. Every country rejoicing in the dubious benefit of a history has, they say, alike its great national hero and its great national thief: and it is a fact that St. George endures in balladry with Robin Hood, St. Denis with Cartouche, St. Andrew with Rob Roy. Then, too, if Belgium yet remembers Tyl Ulenspiegel, Spain has not yet forgotten Guzman d'Alfarache, nor Germany her Schinderhannes, nor Hungary her Schubry. Everywhere through the shadowland of legend canter and gallop—with the gleaming eyes of nocturnal creatures, with a multitudinous tossed shining of steel,—these "squires of the night's body, Diana's foresters, these minions of the moon," whom the prosaic call thieves and highwaymen: and everywhere men have admired and cherished some cunning strong unconquerable rogue.

This foible has from the beginning been recognized and shared by the literary artist. It is perhaps one reason (among others) why really reputable persons have always felt, however obscurely, that there is something dangerous in novels; and why the reading of fiction has always been more or less

deprecated by all citizens of appreciable elevation and influence. And here the well-thought-of are, very luckily for the literary artist, far more profoundly in the right than ever the well-thought-of have comprehended: for in all polities imaginative literature has tirelessly advocated revolution, by depicting the possibilities of a more pleasure-giving state of affairs; and in his diversions the artist has consistently tended to identify himself with the rogue and the law-breaker.

## § 28

Romantic art has from the first inclined to glorify the breaker of laws current in the artist's lifetime. Nor are the provocatives for this sedition obscure; since no society has ever provided any exact or generally respected status for the artist, nor afforded him, at most, much more than the half-contemptuous, cosseting indulgence which is granted to lap-dogs. Moreover, the artist alone is permitted hourly to use his reason,—an action which in any other walk of life would at once upset business usage or professional etiquette,—because of men's general conviction that here it doesn't especially matter. In consequence the artist has always found our human ordering of this world, under all régimes, to be unsatisfactory; and to offenders against any part of

this ordering he inclines with irrational unavoidable sympathy. . . . You may, in fact, observe that nobody is quite at ease in dealing with a policeman: the man represents, however genially, with howsoever bright adornments of figured brass and rubicundity, an oppression that is upon us; and while in theory the relation between the legally honest taxpayer and his two hired and liveried retainers, the policeman and the mail-carrier, is the same, one notes in practise a marked difference. The courts and officers of the law, and all legal processes, are matters with which we as if by instinct avoid involvement: for, here again, man occupies somewhat the position of a Frankenstein. . . . So Robin Hood is voted an unending triumph, from black letter ballads to the moving pictures, and the fact that Christ was crucified by due process of law has everlastingly endeared His story to romantic art and human sympathy.

Now very often, I daresay, the artist is guided by this sympathy for the rogue without suspecting its existence. Thus even in the most genteel and circumspect of arts,—which I take to be the composition of a novel in the English language,—it is droll to find from the beginning the most respectable of scribes, if not always of pharisees, depicting one or another rascally law-breaker with fervors of fond admiration whereof the writer seems wholly uncon-

scious. For the English novel began with the rogueries of Lovelace and Tom Jones. Then followed the chronicles of Rob Roy and Jack Sheppard and Paul Clifford, most exemplary and magnanimous of highwaymen. Seth Pecksniff presently fell down the steps of his cottage in Wiltshire: and tall Redmund Barry fled up to Dublin, just two years later, after his duel with Captain Quin. By and by, in Lymport, the great Mel assumed his overtight lieutenant's uniform, and was laid out in his coffin, by way of beginning the tale which his personality infuses all through: and the gay young Master of Ballantrae (after tossing a guinea with his brother) travelled northward from Durrisdeer, singing as he rode toward Culloden, with a fine new white cockade in his hat. . . . For all these are rogues, in each of whom his creator obviously joyed, no matter under what protective coloration of moral purpose and of self-deceit.

## § 29

That art is a criticism of life, appears a favorite apothegm among those who know least about either. Yet the statement is true enough, in the sense that prison-breaking is a criticism of the penitentiary. Art is, in its last terms, an evasion of the distasteful. The artist simply does not like the earth he inhabits:

for the laws of nature his admiration has always been remarkably temperate; and with the laws of society he has never had any patience whatever.

So the literary artist leaves the earth which he inhabits, daily and with no more to-do than daily is made over the same feat by professional aeronauts. And the literary artist diverts himself by constructing other worlds, whose orderings are different, and to his mind more approvable. All creative writers have thus, whether consciously or no, embarked in an undertaking compared with which the axiomatic attempt to weave ropes of sand or to construct silk purses from even less adapt material is a quite sane and unassuming enterprise. For the literary artist here is at play with the second of his adversaries, with piety; and has offered to instruct the aggregate wisdom of his fellows and even of Omnipotence how to create a more satisfactory world.

By the less venturous the suggestions thrown out have been partial and in the nature of slight amendments to existent orderings. For centuries where magic has attempted to coerce Providence, and religion has urged the bribing of Heaven, whether with burnt offerings or good behavior, here the artist has more urbanely adhered to moral suasion, by setting a praiseworthy example for the Demiurge to follow. . . . Thus has the novelist long proposed, through this delicate intimation of setting the

example, that a time limit might advantageously be placed upon human discomforts, and immunity from the sum total be granted, say, along with a marriage license. Suitable incomes, it has in the same tactful way been suggested to Providence, should be conferred upon all virtuous and guileless persons, for whom the bonds of reality rarely afford coupons. And something certainly ought to be done about man's positively dangerous racial custom of getting older and dying; for which the novelist's alternative would seem to be that, after an equitable distribution of confessions and brides and unexpected legacies and jail-sentences, everybody should enter a static condition of middle age. Such at least is the impression left by the last paragraphs of our elder novels, with all the characters congealed into perdurable domesticity and standing sponsor for one another's children. Scheherezade is, to me, the only known tale-teller who has punctiliously and convincingly accounted for the future of her puppets, after the winding up of each comedy, by stating that they were duly disposed of by the destroyer of delights, and presumably the undertaker. . . . Let it, in fine, be understood that the business of human life, as we know it, will by and by be reorganized, and everything be made entirely and permanently different: and fortified by that firm understanding, we can for the present allow the conditions of human

life. That much at least has been from the beginning a proviso insisted upon by every creative writer.

But those whom life has more deeply disappointed and bored, these turn to diverting themselves with worlds that are in everything dissimilar from the one world with which ill luck has made them familiar. These are the romantics, the fantastics, who, cursed with actual imagination, devoted it in youth to prefiguring what life must be when you became an untrammeled adult. They have faced the reality, they have faced the real and incredible antickry of men as social units. They have faced it with a candor uncharacteristic of common-sense. And they have now no further concern with the laws and other hebetudes of men, except to forget these disappointments as utterly as possible, and to divert themselves in worlds of their own creation wherein their whims are the only laws. So Ulenspiegel is sent hunting werwolves; Holy Maël is tricked into sailing northward, in a demon-rigged stone trough, among fabulous seas and immodest sirens; the huge shadow which bears obscurely, as if beneath the wings of a bat, the Seven Deadly Sins, is cast across the roof of Anthony's hut in the Thebaid; the Snow Queen is bundled into a great sledge painted white, and fetched south to kidnap little Kay; Alice is lured into the rabbit hole and tumbled, very slowly, down that very deep well whose walls were inset with

cupboards and bookshelves: and the creating romantic is diverted.

§ 30

Meanwhile you may note the unreflective raising somewhat of a pother over the circumstance that the artist is as a rule disliked and is belittled, if not actually persecuted, by his contemporaries. Yet no other outcome can seem more natural, I am afraid, when you consider that the art of every important creative writer is an hourly protest that he finds his contemporaries dull and inadequate persons, and that he esteems the laws which they have devised, and live under, to be imbecile. Laws based upon rationality one could endure: but any sane person, as the fretted artist perceives, must regard with an eye full of provisos the professed aim of so many of our laws, to make for the public's general welfare and happiness. For the artist is logical; and therein differs from the majority of his fellows, who unthinkingly assume that all efforts to promote the well-being of mankind at large are praiseworthy. I myself concede that we are here apt, through however admirable motives, to act precipitately, where one calm instant's thought would tend to show all such efforts irreligious and illogical. By no religious code, and by no course of logic taught in any school, is the average man entitled to happiness: his de-

merits justify in logic the earthly misery which religion postulates: and to impose upon him happiness would be, by the best-thought-of standards, an unreasonable and blasphemous act, which, one may proudly say, American civilization has never come anywhere near committing.

Instead, the orthodox should find it very gratifying to note with what complete inutility altruism flourishes everywhere, and legal enactments pullulate to promote men's general well-being; since faith and logic alike, I take it, are strengthened by the utterness with which all these laws fail, and, in fact, appear to muddle matters rather worse than ever.

And it is perhaps a good thing too that we, who have taxes, by-laws, licenses, passports, burial certificates, and permits to marry,—we who must do all that is done by us either in violation or with the permission of one or another law, we who live bound and fretted by innumerable small legal requirements and taboos and restrictions,—cannot in the least imagine what living must have been like under less omnipresently paternal governments. In simpler and upon the whole less muddle-headed ages the relatively few laws whereunder mankind lived did not pretend to accomplish anybody's positive benefit; their slighter and more feasible aim was to prevent your undue annoyance of anybody else: and, that secured, the laws took—it becomes a positively in-

credible concept,—no further account of your actions. . . .

—Which is not of course to suggest that the artist fared in more Arcadian days a whit the merrier. I would not imply that the artist was then content with his material surroundings, nor that in any society he is likely ever to be content. Here and there, to be sure, as I have admitted, he wins to the cuddlings and applause of the lapdog with a quaint repertoire of tricks; and dies, some while after forgetting these tricks, comfortably enough of being over-pampered. But the romantics, the true romantics, these also, are in a wholly un-Falstaffian sense all minions of the moon,—who has condemned them, as I recall my Baudelaire, eternally to love the place where they are not and the woman whom they know not. Astrology is more exact; and, under those whom the moon rules, defines very perfectly the true romantic, as "a soft tender creature, a searcher of and delighter in novelties; unsteadfast, timorous, prodigal; loving peace and to live free from care; hating labor; and content in no condition of life, either good or ill." To me that last clause seems in every sense conclusive.

He that is born one of the minions of the moon must therefore always be a little at odds with what his fellows describe as piety. For his reason, such as it is, compels him to disapprove of most human

laws, upon the ground of their foolishness, and of most natural laws, upon the ground, not merely of their unreason nor even of their lewdness and cruelty, but of their ugly and unæsthetic results. So that in the worlds he builds as both a lesson and a rebuke to Providence, the creative artist inclines to favor and to place in a heroic light such persons as Tyl Ulenspiegel and Robin Hood, who, by the standards of human laws, are better fitted for jail. Nor is that all. . . .

§ 31

No: that is not by any means all. For the romantic enters into frank competition with nature by attempting not merely to create more interesting persons than nature creates, but also to outvie nature by making his creations durable. And, as a sort of supreme affront, creative art now and then plucks from the graveyard one of nature's put-by failures, and, with a triumphant, "See now what I can do with the very material this bungler has flung away!" converts the dead man or woman into an ever-living romantic myth. So are begotten those favored persons whose vitality and whose adventuring each generation of mankind renews. . . . I refer, of course, to such persons as Prometheus and Pan and Judas and the Sphinx,—and to Andromeda and Helen of Troy and Satan. I refer to the Wandering Jew

and Faust and Odysseus, who stay always irresistible to the romanticist: and I refer to King Solomon and Queen Cleopatra and the knight Tannhäuser, and to Lilith and Don Juan also, for whom are yet reserved, we know, the most spirit-stirring adventures in the manuscripts of writers still unborn. I refer to Blue Beard, and to Dame Mélusine, and to Punch, and to a great many others who were so lucky as to originate in a satisfyingly romantic myth, and who in consequence stay always real and always free of finding life monotonous.

Now, it is an ever-present reminder of our own impermanence to note that no human being stays real. In private annals a species of familiary canonization sets in with each fresh advent of the undertaker; no sooner, indeed, do our moribund lie abed than we begin even in our thoughts to lie like their epitaphs; and all of us by ordinary endure the pangs of burying ineffably more admirable kin than we ever possessed. . . . Nor does much more of honesty go to the making of those national chronicles which Mr. Henry Ford, with a candor that at one time really seemed incurable by anything short of four years in the White House, has described as "bunk." In history one finds everywhere an impatient desire to simplify the tortuous and complex human being into a sort of forthright shorthand. Alexander was ambitious, Machiavelli cunning,

Henry the Eighth bloodthirsty, and George Washington congenitally incapable of prevarication. That is all there was to them, so far as they concern the average man: and thus does history imply its shapers with the most curt of symbols, somewhat as an astronomer jots down a four's first cousin to indicate the huge planet Jupiter and compresses the sun that nourishes him, into a proof-reader's period. Always in this fashion does history work over its best rôles into allegories about the Lord Desire of Vain-glory and Mr. By-ends, about Giant Bloody-man and Mr. Truthful; and rubs away the humanness of each dead personage resistlessly, as if resolute to get rid in any event of most of him; and pares him of all traits except the one which men, whether through national pride or the moralist's large placid preference for lying, have elected to see here uncarnate.

Quite otherwise fare those luckier beings who began existence with the advantage of being incorporeal, and hence have not any dread of time's attrition. The longer that time handles them, the more does he enrich their experience and personalities. . . .

## § 32

I found recorded, for example, not long ago, in Mr. Robert Nichols' fine book *Fantastica,* the very latest adventures of three of these favored beings.

And let me protest forthwith that I profoundly enjoyed this book. This trio of stories, about such copious protagonists as Andromeda and the Sphinx and the Wandering Jew, came, to me at least, as the most amiable literary surprise since Mr. Donn Byrne published *Messer Marco Polo.* Here was beauty and irony and wisdom; here was fine craftsmanship: but here, above all, were competently reported the more recent events in the existence of favored persons whose vitality and whose adventuring each generation of mankind renews.

I found, for instance, Mr. Nichols writing very beautifully about Andromeda. Well, it was Euripides, they say, who first popularized this myth of Andromeda: and, for all that the dramas he wrote about her are long lost, it were time-wasting, of a dullness happily restricted to insane asylums and the assembly halls of democratic legislation, here to deliberate whether Andromeda or Euripides be to us the more important and vivid person, in a world wherein Euripides survives as a quadrisyllable and wherein Andromeda's living does, actually, go on. You have but, for that matter, to compare Andromeda with the overlords of the milieu in which her fame was born, with the thin shadows that in pedants' thinking, and in the even gloomier minds of schoolboys upon the eve of an "examination," troop wanly to prefigure Cleon and Pericles and Nicias, to

see what a leg up toward immortality is the omission of any material existence. These estimable patriots endure at best as wraiths and nuisances, in a world wherein Andromeda's living does, actually, go on. It is not merely that she continues to beguile the poet and painter, but that each year she demonstrably does have quite fresh adventures. . . . Only yesterday, I reflected, Mr. C. C. Martindale had attested as much, in his engaging and far too scantly famous book, *The Goddess of Ghosts;* as now did Mr. Nichols in *Fantastica.* . . . For it is, through whatever human illogic, yesterday's fictitious and most clamantly impossible characters who remain to us familiar and actual persons, the while that we remember yesterday's flesh-and-blood notables as bodiless traits.

So it comes about that only these intrepid men and flawless women and other monsters who were born cleanlily of imagination, in lieu of the normal messiness, and were born as personages in whom, rather frequently without knowing why, the artist perceives a satisfying large symbolism,—that these alone bid fair to live and thrive until the proverbial crack of doom. Their living does, actually, go on, because each generation of artists is irresistibly impelled to provide them with quite fresh adventures. . . . And no one can, with certainty, say why. One merely knows that these favored romantic myths, to

whom just now I directed the stiletto glance of envy, remain the only persons existent who may with any firm confidence look forward to a colorful and always varying future, the only persons who stay human in defiance of death and time and the even more dreadful theories of "new schools of poetry"; and who keep, too, undimmed the human trait of figuring with a difference in the eye of each beholder. For all the really fine romantic myths have this in common. As Mr. Nichols phrases it, in approaching a continuation of the story of Prometheus one may behold in the Fire-Bringer, just as one's taste elects, a pre-figuring of Satan or of Christ or of Mr. Thomas Alva Edison.

And this one sometimes guesses to be—perhaps—the pith of such myths' durability, that the felt symbolism admits of no quite final interpreting. Each generation finds for Andromeda a different monster and another rescuer; continuously romance and irony endeavor to contrive new riddles for the Sphinx; whereas the Wandering Jew—besides the tour de force of having enabled General Lew Wallace to write a book which voiced more fatuous blather than *Ben-Hur,*—has had put to his account, at various times, the embodying of such disparate pests as thunderstorms and gypsies and Asiatic cholera.

Well! here—just for an instant to recur to *Fantastica,* as a volume which I delight in commending

to the particular notice of the urbane,—here one finds Mr. Nichols also writing remarkably contemporaneous parables about the Sphinx and her latest lover, about Andromeda and Perseus, about the Wandering Jew and Judas Iscariot. They are, to my finding, very wise and lovely tales; they are, I hope, the graduating theses of a maturing poet who has become sufficiently sophisticated to put aside the, after all, rather childish business of verse-making. But the really important feature, in any event, is that Robert Nichols adds to the unending imbroglios of these actually vital persons, and guides with competence and a fine spirit the immortal travellers. Nor is this any trivial praise when you recall that, earlier, they have been served by such efficient if slightly incongruous couriers as Goethe and Charles Kingsley and Euripides and Eugène Sue, as Matthew of Paris and Flaubert and Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Reverend George Crowley.

## § 33

For these great myths have, over and above that quality of which I spoke just now as wizardry, some common and not readily definable power which resistlessly makes captive the dreams of men of all conditions and faiths and degrees of intelligence. I can remember puzzling a long while over what con-

ceivable feature these so divergent stories could be said to have in common; since some shared trait must be, I reasoned, the explanation of their virtually uniform allure. And these myths baffled me. Their might seemed, as their origin, not wholly explicable. I say "their origin" because no great romantic myth seemed the product of any especial brain. Never could we detect any writer seated at his desk about the diligent invention of any one of these stories, told now for the first time. Rather did legends gather slowly and contradictorily, arising none knew whence, about the tale's protagonist, who was by ordinary an actual personage some while since dead. By and by somebody had perhaps written down a part of this rumor, always with plain inability to narrate the whole; and the result might be, to the one side an *Odyssey,* to the other a *Juif Errant.* . . . Sometimes one of these inexplicably macrobiotic myths had found no formal chronicler, and for centuries existed in detachment from literature. There was, for example, I reflected, the fine figure of Punch, which imaginative artists had prodigally left unexploited. In fact, nobody except Mr. Conrad Aiken[1] seemed ever to have written with seriousness about Punch; and this superb theme as yet awaited merely the attention of some gifted writer, to enrich the world with a masterpiece. Then

[1] A minor poet and essayist of the period.

there was Mélusine. There was, for that matter, Blue Beard. . . . All these stayed uncommemorated with any adequacy as yet, and were, despite that fact, no whit the less recognizable as magnificent and immortal.

I could not see that these old stories had anything whatever in common; and even if in these ageless fables some shared feature were discovered, that would hardly explain the unvarying strange sequel. It would not, I thought, explain the emergence from the "story" of a figure which, the story done with, and all its incidents put behind, continued to live on in other stories, and continued through generation after generation to have quite fresh adventures. Nothing seemed able ever to explain that. Yet it was a fact. One was tempted to imagine these immortal figures had guiles of their own, and exerted strange potencies less to afford the artist a fruitful theme than to demand his service. Man here again, it might be, enacted his not infrequent rôle of Frankenstein. . . . At any rate, the secret was not in the stories: artists did not repeat these stories, but instead arranged new imbroglios for the old tales' protagonists.

Of course the truth was that these figures, for one reason or another as yet unrevealed to me, were such as, for that reason, appealed to a majority of creating romanticists. They were toys with which, for

howsoever veiled causes, the artist peculiarly delighted to play. It might, I guessed, have been the element of dubiety which fascinated, and the half-vexed feeling that, when all which is apparent to sense and rationality had been checked off and labeled, much yet remained amenable to neither. It might be, just as I had said, the pith of such myths' durability that the felt symbolism admits of no quite final interpreting; and so arouses the not utterly rational suspicion that the whole truth about these mythic figures has never yet been apprehended by anybody.

§ 34

Strikingly did this seem exemplified by the perennial magic of Pan. His epopee, as taken over by the artist, was virtually eventless. Pan figured in no story of marked interest or importance. He merely was: and what he was, nobody had presumed to voice with any precision. Pan was but indicated —always with a queer effect of the narrator's suspecting somebody might, undesirably, be eavesdropping,—by this vague talk about a hirsute wanderer with the horns and feet of a goat and a taste for pipe-playing: these features were, you knew, not the essentials. Such tales recorded only small and immaterial truths, as if—you somehow knew,—you were to define the Pope as an elderly Catholic who

wears underclothing and eats breakfast, or a duly nominated candidate for the White House as a Protestant of unexigent honesty. So the creating romanticist had begun to divert himself with guesses about Pan: and now these guesses filled libraries.

But Pan was not in the library. He was afield, he was in all the magazines for the month after next now on the news-stands, having quite fresh adventures, which yet-living poets were under a tribal bond to contrive for him. In the records of English literature research might look in vain for any considerable poet who had not paid his scot of contriving some fresh adventure for Pan, and Pan yet roved the jungle of free verse. Pan, alone of the old Hellenic gods, had thus lived on, and had survived all his peers. Pan would not, to be sure, especially regret them, since he had never forgathered with the other gods. . . .

And there, in that seemingly irrelevant fact, I began to detect a darkling light. Pan had never forgathered with the other gods: Olympos he appeared at utmost to visit now and then, with, as I recall *The Book of Job,* a curious similarity to Satan's coming among the sons of God, "from going to and fro in the earth and walking up and down in it." Pan, also, that unexplainedly dreadful and lonely wanderer, was the divine outcast. In the one existent story, that of Psyche, wherein Pan was rep-

resented as having any even very remote dealing with the other gods, his part was to aid a mortal against them. Pan, alone of the gods, had abandoned, and at a pinch sided against, Heaven. And that might well be the reason why the romantic artist had cherished him.

That perhaps was why Pan had become for romanticists the Master. That might be why, when Olympos crumbled, romanticists had set between those ungainly horns the pentagram; had caused this hairy brown body to burgeon with scales and feathers; had given to the most virile of the gods the breasts of a woman; and had kindled in his honor the moons of Chesed and Geburah. The goat god had thus, alone of the Olympians, endured. He endured as Baphomet, as Azazel, as Janicot, as Eblis; as the Master of the Gnostics, the Master of the Sabbath, the Master of the Two Moons, moons which had, here again, their minions. . . .

I shall not, in this place, speak at any length of what the prosaic perhaps do well to regard as bedlamite nonsense: here I shall only indicate from afar the mystery I could not ignore. For I knew that the romantic had whispered of two scapegoats, of Christ and Pan, the saviors severally of religion and of art: the one dying in atonement for human sin, in the manner of the stainless beast which was sacrificed in the Temple; the other serving men in the

manner of that other beast, not necessarily immaculate, which was loaded with the sins of the twelve tribes, and driven out of the Temple forever, as one consecrated not to death but to life, and condemned not to rest but to the exile's freedom, in those desert places which belonged to Pan-Azazel. For it is recorded—where we would least look for it, even in our English Bible,[1]—that the Lord of Sabaoth commanded such sacrifice and such honor be divided between Himself and the goat god, as equals share. And it is recorded too, in the sacred lore of the Moslems, that to the Master of the Two Moons, and to that especial manifesting of Pan which the East called Eblis, was relinquished by Heaven—through a compact such as, once again, is made by equals,—the overlordship of all loneliness, of wine, of verse and song and rhetoric, and of all the arts. You will perceive this is, very exactly, the heritage of the creating romantic. . . .

Well! thus Christ had His servitors, whose reward was to be, by and by, in a land fulfilled with the glory of the Sun, eternal rest: and Pan, the Master of the Two Moons, had mustered likewise his minions, whose reward was their work. By these exceedingly diverse saviors, I knew, had been evolved the magic of the sanctuary and of the wilder-

[1] In the Revised Version: King James's bishops hushed up this awkward matter with a pious mistranslation.

ness, the white magic and another magic rather less candid. So had arisen the messiahs who led men severally to hope for contentment to come, or to create contentment, somehow, even in this unsatisfying life and moment. . . . Pan was, in fine, the god who had looked upon the divine handiwork, and seen that it was not good; or, at any rate, not good enough. The creating romanticist had always hoped that somewhere must at least one such clear-sighted god exist; and, finding him, had worshipped appropriately. . . .

And so I got my clue, and esteemed it, upon the whole, unwelcome.

For I saw that the one feature common to all the great mythic figures over whose deathlessness I had been puzzling, was that each was a divine and unrepentant outcast, that each one of them was a rebel who had gained famousness by warring in one way or another against Heaven. And that might be, I felt uncomfortably, just what had made them to all creative artists irresistible. Here well might lurk, for so long unapprehended by me, another and more lurid instance of art's need to make sport with piety; here revealed in art's unfaltering endeavor to glorify not merely the rogue but the rebel. Once the discovery might have pleased me. But nowadays, rebellion in any form really does seem rather unurbane and almost certainly futile: and very much as peni-

tent Villon turned monk, or as the wild Highlanders ceased to rebel after the Stuarts lost in 'Forty-five, so have I found the same numeral to be remarkably sedative.

Nevertheless, at the bottom of his heart, the romantic artist, I knew, has not ever been in harmony with Providence and this world's Demiurge. He has not ever honestly believed, as I recall the dicta of John Charteris, that this world reflected credit upon its Maker. And so, toward offenders against this divine ordering the artist might well incline with unavoidable, unreasoning and, I preferred to think, unconscious sympathy.

## § 35

Certainly, of the myths I have named, all save two deal with protagonists who are condemned perforce to struggle against, and who contrive to thwart, inimical gods, as did Andromeda and Odysseus; or who rebel with the volition and candor of Satan and Tannhäuser and Prometheus. But the myths of the Sphinx and of Queen Helen rest upon other bases of impiety. . . . Helen, indeed, stands pedestalled above the bickerings of mere gods. . . . And to the romantic the Sphinx has never really been that offensively feeble-minded monster who molested Œdipus with a conundrum so inane as to result, quite properly, in the death of its perpetrator.

Instead, the Sphinx has become, for the romantic, the one being who foreknows the answer to all riddles and the outcome of all experience. And because of this foreknowledge, obviously denied to demiurgically experimenting gods, the Sphinx does nothing. . . . This dreadful certitude, equally male and female, as was Baphomet and as was the veiled Lord of Mommur, this quietness that is equally a beast of the field and an unslayable immortal, this very large and pitiless felinity, lies waiting; and waits in blasphemous and perturbingly untroubled ease. The years pass; pious nations come into being and high power and pass; heaven is no longer great enough to contain a catalogue of the gods that have reigned in heaven: the Sphinx, men say, has never stirred. For the Sphinx waits. All the august doings of Olympos and Sinai and Valhalla have been witnessed by the Sphinx: and the most favorable interpreting of that changeless face is, upon the whole, to hope it wears the provisional smile we bend toward the playing of not yet unbearable children. And therein lies the impiety of the waiting Sphinx, in this amused deep comprehension that there is no need to rebel against our gods. . . . For the Sphinx is immortal: and the secret of the Sphinx, men say, is that secret which the harried gods strive desperately to surmise: the Sphinx knows why no god may ever hope to be immortal.

## § 36

Yes: all these so inexplicably popular myths commemorate a rebel against Heaven's orderings. Each myth, in one fashion or another, adopts the true Byronic posture of looking the Omnipotent in the face and imparting to Him the, upon the whole unstartling, information that His evil is not good. And that—where every dictum is perforce an hypothesis,—that well may be why these especial myths, rather than others, overruled the art of yesterday; and why upon us is yet laid their mastery, from which the spiritual descendants of us who are minions of the moon shall not escape.

No matter into what sort of world this planet develops, through howsoever laudable a magic-working of social and mechanical and hygienic improvements, that future also belongs to these inscrutable immortals. Into that world, however handsomely it all be changed by new inventions and fresh fallacies, I think, they will come as conquerors.

First will come Helen. I mean that Helen who was verily at Troy. For the wife of Menelaus, we know, did not ever come to this city: and Philostratus tells us how the whole truth as to the Greeks' crusade, in the high cause of outraged morality, was revealed by Achilles' ghost to Apollonius of Tyana. "For a long time we leaders of the

Achæans were deceived and tricked into fighting battles in Helen's behalf, through our belief that she was in Ilium; whereas she really was living in Egypt, in the house of Proteus, whither through the device of Zeus she had been snatched away from Paris. But when we became convinced of this, we continued fighting to win Troy itself and the riches of Troy and the power these riches would give to us, proclaiming that this empire must be destroyed in order that the world might be made safe for democracy." And from Egypt Helen's husband—if that at all matters,—duly retrieved her on his way homeward when the warring was done.

But Hera, it is recorded, gave to Paris that woman's likeness, made of the white mists of night and of dawn's rosy-colored clouds and of the golden clouds of sunset, and shaped in that perfect loveliness with which Hera had before this time betrayed Ixion, leading the King of Thessaly to beget upon this shining phantom a dreadful spawn of twisted and blotched monsters. . . . And this bright emptiness was what the heroes fought for, in the most famous yet not by any means the most irrational of all the wars that have ever been. And when the warring was done, the leaders shared the spoils with much quarreling, and maimed soldiers knew they had fought for a colored mist, in this war also.

So Troy fell because the appearance of this phan-

tom had beauty without any flaw. And the Trojans died. And the Greeks died. And Menelaus and his wife died too. And in time Queen Hera also died. But the phantom that had been at Troy endured, masterless, purposeless, and immortal.

Wherever men have been, she too, the romantic aver, has passed like a cool flame of marsh-fire, passionlessly, inconceivably bright: and of the beauty of this Helen there are many tales recorded. Yet whosoever has not seen her, it is declared by these poets also, to him beauty remains but one of the words he puts upon paper. They that have seen her, are a wistful folk who go thereafter with dazzled eyes and can write nothing truly. None the less does Helen keep her old complaisance; she, impassionate, denies not anything to the passion of her lovers: and they may still beget upon her loveliness all manner of twisted and blotched monsters, in the fashion of the King of Thessaly. So art endures, and critics and curators are providentially provided for. And Helen grants to her lovers everything except happiness: that they may never hope for; that she has not to give, nor has she ever known of it, who goes as a bright emptiness, without any like or kindred anywhere save in the monsters which are her spawn, as Helen passes from the ruining of one lover to another lover, masterless, purposeless, and immortal. . . .

Yes, Helen will come first, I think. And near to her, no doubt, will follow her servitors from of old, crafty and great-thewed Odysseus, and Faust, in the pulled down cap and the furred robe of a scholar. And Don Juan, and pallid, desperate Tannhäuser, and Ahasuerus, who has put away despairing and hope forever, will come too; with many others.

And for an instant these thronged myths will look smilingly upon the ensorcelled romanticists of that far-off strange future. In that instant all the "new" schools of literature will perish; all the magazines sufficiently "vital" to be in bankruptcy will suspend publication; and—for that single instant,—the youngest of that far day's "realists" will cease from telling about what a devil of a fellow he was at college.

"Now," these immortals will say, "do you leave off this foolishness, and contrive for us fresh adventures."

And the tale-tellers will obey.

# IV

# THE THIN QUEEN OF ELFHAME

"This pleasing method of instilling instruction into the mind has been found by experience to be the shortest and best way of accomplishing that end among all ranks of persons. The fable of The Poor Man and His Lamb, for example, as related by Nathan to King David, carried with it a blaze of truth that flashed conviction on the mind of the royal transgressor: and many lessons of reproof, religion, and morality, we find to be continually delivered in this mode by the sages."

## 4.

## *The Thin Queen of Elfhame*

### § 37

THE literary artist plays, I had said, with these large ageless symbols. And all artists would, I thought, continue indefinitely in such playing, because their fundamental desire in life is not quite the same desire which guides their fellows. The artist is as other men: he may well, in common with Shylock, assert himself to be fed by the same food and subject to the same diseases as a Christian is: and yet between him and the Christian is a difference.

Certainly, there was a difference: and the nearest I could come to defining this difference was to say it lay paradoxically housed in the circumstance that the artist, precisely like the most zealous of Christians, is in this material, four-square world not ever utterly at home. The Christian's desiderated home, we knew, was heaven: but the artist, as I had suggested, looked to a somewhat different savior. Meanwhile the artist went among men as a visitor,

evincing at once the astonished interest and the detachment of a tourist in a foreign country. His home, and his fundamental desire, stayed elsewhere. This world of men and women did not content nor even vitally concern him: and always he wanted—no matter with what nebulousness he envisaged his need,—something else, which, somehow, was his heritage.

Some day, the artist felt, he would set forth to seek and find this needed something, like Anavalt in the old tale which I had once retold. And I fell here to recalling the story of Anavalt's last quest. For I had been assured time and again that this tale was a parable of a withdrawal from life to the solaces of art, and that there was some obvious symbolism, toward the end, in a seemingly off-hand reference to the tenuity of canvas and of paper. And I could only reply with the admission which youth finds it impossible to make about anything, but which with age comes easier. I said, I do not know. Nescience seemed alike the end and the beginning of the old story, which narrated why so many silken ladies wept. . . .

## § 38

For even just how many silken ladies wept, well out of eyeshot of their husbands, when it was known

that courteous Anavalt had left Count Emmerick's court, remains an indeterminable matter. But it is certain the number was large. There were, in addition, the tale tells, three women whose grieving for him was not ever to be ended: these did not weep. In the meanwhile, with all this furtive sorrowing some leagues behind him, and with a dead horse at his feet, tall Anavalt stood at a sign-post, and doubtfully considered a rather huge dragon.

"No," the dragon was saying, comfortably, "no, for I have just had dinner, and exercise upon a full stomach is unwholesome. So I shall not fight you, and you are welcome, for all of me, to go your ways into the Wood of Elfhame."

"Yet what," says Anavalt, "what if I were to be more observant than you of your duty and of your hellish origin? and what if I were to insist upon a fight to the death?"

When dragons shrug in sunlight their bodies are one long green glittering ripple. "I would be conquered. It is my business to be conquered in this world, where there are two sides to everything, and where one must look for reverses. I tell you frankly, tired man, that all we terrors who keep colorful the road to the Elle Maid are here for the purpose of being conquered. We make the way seem difficult, and that makes you who have souls in your bodies the more determined to travel on it.

Our thin Queen found out long ago that the most likely manner of alluring men to her striped windmill was to persuade men she is quite inaccessible."

Said Anavalt, "That I can understand; but I need no such baits."

"Aha, so you have not been happy out yonder where people have souls? You probably are not eating enough: so long as one can keep on eating regularly, there is not much the matter. In fact, I see the hunger in your eyes, tired man."

Anavalt said:

"Let us not discuss anybody's eyes, for it is not hunger, nor indigestion either, which drives me to the Wood of Elfhame. There is a woman yonder, dragon, a woman whom ten years ago I married. We loved each other then, we shared a noble dream. To-day we sleep together, and have no dreams. To-day I go in flame-colored satin, with heralds before me, into bright long halls where kings await my counsel, and my advising becomes the law of cities that I have not seen. The lords of this world accredit me with wisdom, and say that nobody is more shrewd than Anavalt. But when at home, as if by accident, I tell my wife about these things, she smiles, not very merrily. For my wife knows more of the truth as to me and my powers and my achievements than I myself would care to know: and I can no longer endure the gaze of her forgiving

eyes, and the puzzled hurt which is behind that forgiveness. So let us not discuss anybody's eyes."

"Well, well!" the dragon returned, "if you come to that, I think it would be more becoming for you not to discuss your married life with strangers, especially when I have just had dinner, and am just going to have a nap."

With that the evil worm turned round three times, his whiskers drooped, and he coiled up snugly about the sign-post which said "Keep Out of These Woods." He was a time-worn and tarnished dragon, as you could see now, with no employment in the world since men had forgotten the myth in which he used to live appallingly; so he had come, in homeless decrepitude, to guard the Wood of Elfhame.

Anavalt thus left this inefficient and outmoded monster.

## § 39

And the tale tells how, when Anavalt had passed this inefficient and outmoded monster, Anavalt went into the wood. He did not think of the tilled meadows or the chests of new-minted coin or the high estate which belonged to Anavalt in the world where people have souls. He thought of quite other matters as he walked in a dubious place. Here to the right of Anavalt's pathway were seen twelve in

red tunics: they had head-dresses of green, and upon their wrists were silver rings. These twelve were alike in shape and age and loveliness: there was no flaw in the appearance of any, there was no manner of telling one from another. All these made a lament, with small sweet voices that followed the course of a thin and tinkling melody: they sang of how much better were the old times than the new; and none could know more thoroughly than did Anavalt the reason of their grieving, but since they did not molest him he had no need to meddle with these women's secrets any more. So he went on: and nothing as yet opposed him; at most, a grasshopper started from the path, sometimes a tiny frog made way for him.

He came to a blue bull that lay in the road, blocking it.

§ 40

The tale tells that a blue bull lay in the road, blocking it. The tale narrates that this beast appeared more lusty and more terrible than other bulls, telling of how all his appurtenances were larger and seemed more prodigally ready to give life and death.

Courteous Anavalt cried out, "O Nandi, now be gracious, and permit me to pass unhindered toward the striped windmill."

"To think," replied the bull, "that you should mistake me for Nandi! No, tired man, the Bull of the Gods is white, and nothing of that serene color may ever come into these woods."

And the bull nodded very gravely, shaking the blue curls that were between his cruel horns.

"Ah, then, sir, I must entreat your forgiveness for the not unnatural error into which I was betrayed by the majesty of your appearance."

While Anavalt was speaking, he wondered why he should be at pains to humor an illusion so trivial as he knew this bull to be. For this of course was just the ruler of the Kittle cattle which everywhere feed upon the dewpools. The Queen of Elfhame, in that low estate to which the world's redemption had brought her, could employ only the most inexpensive of retainers, the Gods served her no longer.

"So you consider my appearance majestic! To think of that now!" observed the flattered bull; and he luxuriously exhaled blue flames. "Well, certainly you have a mighty civil way with you, to be coming from that overbearing world of souls. Still, my duty is, as they say, my duty; fine words are less filling than moonbeams: and, in short, I do not know of any sound reason why I should let you pass toward Queen Vae."

Anavalt answered:

"I must go to your thin mistress because among

the women yonder whose bodies were not denied to me there is one woman whom I cannot forget. We loved each other once; we had, as I recall that radiant time, a quaint and callow faith in our shared insanity. Then somehow I stopped caring for these things, I turned to matters of more sensible worth. She took no second lover, she lives alone. Her beauty and her quick laughter are put away, she is old, and the home of no man is glad because of her who should have been the tenderest of wives and the most merry of mothers. When I see her there is no hatred in the brown eyes which once were bright and roguish, but only forgiveness and a puzzled grieving. Now there is in my mind no reason why I should think about this woman differently from some dozens of other women who were maids when I first knew them, but there is in my mind an unreason that will not put away the memory of this woman's notions about me."

"Well," said the bull, yawning, "for my part, I find one heifer as good as another; and I find, too, that in seeking Queen Vae one pretext is as good as another pretext, especially from the mouth of such a civil gentleman. So do you climb over my back, and go your way, to where there are no longer two sides to everything."

Thus Anavalt passed the King of the Kittle cattle.

§ 41

Anavalt thus passed the King of the Kittle cattle, and the tale tells how Anavalt journeyed deeper into the Wood of Elfhame. No trumpets sounded before him as they sounded when the Anavalt who was a great lord went about the world where people have souls: and the wonders which Anavalt saw to this side and to that side did not disturb him, nor he them. He came to a house of rough-hewn timber, where a black man, clothed in a goat-skin, barked like a dog and made old gestures. This, as Anavalt knew, was the Rago: within the house sat cross-legged, at that very moment, the Forest-Mother, whose living is innocent of every normal vice, and whose food is the red she-goat and men. Yet upon the farther side of the home of perversity was to be seen a rusty nail in the pathway, and bits of broken glass, prosaic relics which seemed to show that men had passed this place.

So Anavalt made no reply to the obscene enticements of the Rago. Anavalt went sturdily on, to a tree which in the stead of leaves was overgrown with human hands: these hands had no longer any warmth in them as they caught at and tentatively figured Anavalt, and presently released him.

Now the path descended, among undergrowth that bore small purple flowers with five petals. Ana-

valt came here upon wolves which went along with him a little way. Running they could not be seen, but as each wolf leaped in his running his gray body would show momentarily among the green bushes that instantly swallowed it: and these wolves cried hoarsely, "Janicot is dead!" But for none of these things did Anavalt care any longer, and none of the peculiarities of Elfhame stayed him, until his path had led further downward, and the roadway had become dark and moist. Here were sentinels with draggled yellow plumes, a pair of sentinels at whom Anavalt looked only once: then with averted head he passed them, in what could not seem a merry place to Anavalt, for in the world where people have souls he was used to mirth and soft ease and to all such delights as men clutch desperately in the shadow of death's clutching hand.

In this place Anavalt found also a naked boy.

## § 42

In this place Anavalt found, as the tale tells, a naked boy whose body was horrible with leprosy: this malady had eaten away his fingers, so that they could retain nothing, but his face was not much changed.

The leper stood knee-deep in a pile of ashes: and he demanded what Anavalt was called nowadays.

When courteous Anavàlt had answered, the leper said then:

"You are not rightly called Anavalt. But my name is still Owner-of-the-World."

Says Anavalt, very sadly, "Even though you bar my way, ruined boy, I must go forward to the windmill of the Elle Maid."

"And for what reason must you be creeping to this last woman? For she will be the last,—as I forewarn you, tired man, who still pretend to be Anavalt,—she will be the last of all, and of how many!"

Anavalt answered:

"I must go to this last love because of my first love. Once I lay under her girdle, I was a part of the young body of my first love. She bore me to her anguish, even then to her anguish. I cannot forget the love that was between us. But I outgrew my childhood and all childishness: I became, they say, the chief of Manuel's barons: and my living has got me fine food and garments and tall servants and two castles and a known name, and all which any reasonable mother could hope for her son. Yet I cannot forget the love that was between us, nor our shared faith in what was to be! To-day I visit this ancient woman now and then, and we make friendly talk together about everything except my wife, and our lips touch, and I go away. That is all. And it

seems strange that I was once a part of this woman, —I who have never won to nor desired real intimacy with anyone,—and it seems strange to hear people applauding my wisdom and high deeds of statecraft, and in all matters acclaiming the success of Anavalt. I think that this old woman also finds it strange. I do not know, for we can understand each other no longer. I only know that, viewing me, there is in this old woman's filmed eyes a sort of fondness, even now, and a puzzled grieving. I only know that her eyes also I wish never to see any more."

"Still, still, you must be talking Œdipean riddles!" the leper answered. "I prefer simplicity, I incline to the complex no longer. So, very frankly, I warn you, who were Anavalt, that you are going, spent and infatuate, toward your last illusion."

Anavalt replied:

"Rather do I flee pellmell from the illusions of others. Behind me I am leaving the bright swords of adversaries and the more deadly malice of outrivalled friends and the fury of some husbands, but not because I fear these things. Behind me I am leaving the puzzled eyes of women that put faith in me, because I fear these unendurably."

"You should have feared them earlier, tired man," replied the other, "in a sunlit time when I who am Owner-of-the-World would wonderfully have helped you. Now you must go your way, as I go mine.

There is one who may, perhaps, yet bring us together once again; but now we are parted, and you need look for no more reverses."

As he said this, the ruined boy sank slowly into the ash-heap, and so disappeared; and Anavalt went on, through trampled ashes, into the quiet midst of the wood. Among the bones about the striped windmill that is supported by four pillars, the witless Elle Maid was waiting.

## § 43

The witless Elle Maid was waiting there, as the tale tells, among much human wreckage. She rose and cried:

"Now you are very welcome, Sir Anavalt. But what will you give Maid Vae?"

Anavalt answered, "All."

"Then we shall be happy together, dear Anavalt, and for your sake I am well content to throw my bonnet over the windmill."

She took the red bonnet from her head, and turned. She flung her bonnet fair and high. So was courteous Anavalt assured that the Queen of Elfhame was as he had hoped. For when seen thus, from behind, the witless Queen was hollow and shadow-colored, because Maid Vae is just the bright thin mask of a woman, and, if looked at from be-

hind, she is like any other mask, with no more thickness than has canvas or paper. So when she faced him now and smiled,—and as if in embarrassment looked down and pushed aside a thigh bone with her little foot,—then Anavalt could see that the Elle Maid was, when properly regarded, a lovely and most dear illusion.

He kissed her. He was content. Here was the woman he desired, the woman who did not exist in the world where people have souls. The Elle Maid had no mortal body that time would parody and ruin, she had no brain to fashion dreams of which he would fall short, she had no heart that he would hurt. There was an abiding peace in this quiet Wood of Elfhame wherein no love could enter, and nobody could, in consequence, hurt anybody else very deeply. At court the silken ladies wept for Anavalt, and three women were not ever to be healed of their memories: but in the Wood of Elfhame, where all were soulless masks, there were no memories and no weeping, there were no longer two sides to everything, and a man need look for no reverses.

"I think we shall do very well here," said courteous Anavalt, as yet again he kissed Maid Vae.

# V

# CELESTIAL ARCHITECTURE

"To this end, that Scyrian Pherecydes, Pythagoras his Master, broached in the East among the Heathens first the immortality of the Soul, as Trismegistus did in Egypt, with a many of feigned Gods. 'Twas for a politic end and to this purpose the old Poets feigned those Elysian fields, their Æcus, Minos, and Rhadamanthus, their infernal Judges, and those Stygian lakes, fiery Phlegethons, Pluto's kingdom, and variety of torments after death."

## 5.

## *Celestial Architecture*

§ 44

THE literary artist plays, I had said, with death. But everybody played with death: it was the one subject not anywhere to be approached except in a spirit of sober superficiality. And I wanted—in at any event this epilogue to the Biography,—to offend the sensibilities of nobody. At forty-five one has become, with no choice in the matter, bourgeois; and has no least desire to épater one's clan.

Here, indeed, it occurred to me that, somewhat farther back, I had referred, without assuming the proper elongation of countenance and a suitably spondaic utterance, to our natural delight in most forms of what we are generally agreed to describe as sin. And I hoped that would not be taken as implying that we can nowhere find more diverting employment than in wrong-doing, and should give over our lives to its practise. For iniquity, in its

pleasanter branches, I reflected, is a pursuit in which the young excel. With age, one is adapted only for the less amusing crimes: and so with age one tends, upon the whole, and willy-nilly, to become reasonably virtuous. One tends, one in fact is driven, to seek diversion in the alcoves of thought rather than of action. One begins to toy amorously with ideas, now that age abates the ardor and the equipment for more juvenile recreations.

Of course there were many ideas to play with: so congressmen harped zealously upon morals, with a just half-boastful air of having often heard of them; the clergy averted from instructing Heaven in its painful duty toward Germany, to settle civic affairs and the proper number of feet allowable to an embrace in moving picture films; and among our state justiciary far-reaching codes of literary criticism, not to speak of Clean Book Leagues, were evolved by the distressing discovery that one's daughter was running counter to parental traditions by reading a book.

But hardier spirits would play with the greatest and most diverting of all ideas. . . . So that, in the outcome, I decided I would not, as I had intended to do, recur to Henry Adams. His thinking hardly aspires, it lacks such elevation as would warrant dwelling upon its modest pinnacles. Besides, there was always the ugly book which Adams wrote about

John Randolph of Roanoke, to shake one's faith in the *Education*: once anybody has been at public pains to demonstrate himself an expert at coloring and falsifying the truth about another man, he cannot complain if none regards very trustingly his pretensions to write the truth as to himself. No doubt the prompter to this biographical blackguardism, the notion of standing up for your family name and your great-grandfather's intelligence, was all very well: and here, indeed, I could peculiarly sympathize, since it happened that my own paternal great-grandfather, also, had been aspersed by Randolph with just the same spirited and careful malignity he displayed in his verbal portraits of the Adams "bear and cub." Even so, it seemed to me that the natural impulse to atone by defaming Randolph was more easily understood than justified.

## § 45

In any event, this Henry Adams, too, is everywhere faintly rancid with the taint of Puritanism, and that fact could not but lead me into injustice. Puritanism has many excellent points, which it perhaps employs too much in the manner of the porcupine: yet we Virginians cannot ever quite overcome our feeling that the Puritans are parvenus, deriving from families too recently arrived in this country to

be as yet completely Americanized. We have never, for that matter, learned to think of the Pilgrim Fathers and their descendants as belonging, exactly, to the gentry. And while we do try, at a pinch, to be polite and respectful about their undeniable virtues, the result, somehow, stays a bit unconvincing and condescending.

Besides, I had faced my especial troubles with the Puritan tradition, through the imbroglio incidental to the attempt to suppress *Jurgen,* and through the clinging, undesirable repute thus fastened to that book, and indeed to my books in general. I mildly resent, even now, my need to rest for the remainder of my lifetime under the imputation of being in lack-lustre eyes an "indecent writer." It sounds all very well, and stays, I believe, undeniable, to say that it was only a coterie of the obsessed—obsessed with the mad notion that "decency" is an affair of corporal centrifugality,—who had esteemed *Jurgen* an improper book. But that is, too, upon a par with protesting on a pestered summer night it is only mosquitoes who are annoying you. Those shyster Sanhedrins of tinpot Torquemadas—as Mr. Mencken, you may remember, has for some reason or another not yet called the incorporated supporters of the Puritan tradition in letters,—are, beyond question, made up of peculiarly filthy and senseless little creatures acting after the law of their insectean

kind. Yet they are also innumerable and poisonous: and they are blest, too (no doubt in common with the mosquitoes) with sincerity and an approving conscience, in all these assaults of the petty upon that which, however harmless, offends them by being bigger than they are.

But I drift into a discussion of the *Jurgen* case, which, as goes the law, is settled: and all that I really need to say about the indecency of *Jurgen,* or of the Biography as a whole, and about the baffling literary problem of censorship in general, was said some while ago.

§ 46

For censorship of our reading matter, as I granted even when *Jurgen* was yet lying under arrest in Mr. Sumner's [1] cellar, may, in pure theory, be—just possibly—advisable. In practise, though, I can imagine no persons or class of persons qualified to perform this censorship. Speaking here with all, if only, the respect due to the Society for the Suppression of Vice, I must none the less insist there is a difference between pornography and fine literature, if but the difference that everybody enjoys the first where few care one way or the other about the second: and certainly the two should be appraised by

[1] John S. (Sexton?) Sumner; other authorities state that Sex was his middle name; secretary of the then notorious New York State Society for the Suppression of Vice.

diverse and appropriate standards. A work of art should therefore, in theory, be judged entirely as a work of art, by a jury of practitioners of the art concerned.

Yet, since every self-respecting author at bottom abominates his competitors, despises his inferiors, and is frantically irritated by the writings of those who differ from him in æsthetic canons, such an arrangement would, in practise, only fling open more conspicuous fields wherein to flaunt the mutual spite and miscomprehension common to us creative writers. Besides, it is not difficult to forecast what sort of writers might, and would, be chosen for the judiciary, as representing pre-eminence in letters by the happiest combination of mediocrity and senility. Thus, in the end, an attempt to establish a purely "literary" tribunal would result in setting over American art a death-watch of genial clergymen and decrepit college professors: and I despondently question if their decisions would be a whit less imbecile than the present arbitraments of the Society's hired spies.

It remains, moreover, the defect of every method of legal "suppression" that magistrates and courts of law are unable really to suppress any book. A book, once printed, either suppresses itself or else stays, as things human fare, immortal. And that always appeared to me the very silliest feature of the

*Jurgen* imbroglio. Irrespective of any possible legal decision, as I patiently pointed out, over and over again, when *Jurgen* lodged in Mr. Sumner's cellar, the book existed in a sufficient number of unarrestable copies to place it beyond destruction by anything except its own inherent faults. If *Jurgen* contained the right constituents it would live; and if it lacked the stuff of longevity it would in due course die: either way, the outcome was to be decided neither by me nor by vice commissioners, nor even by a judge and a grand jury.

Nobody disputed this logic: nobody in fact paid any attention to it.

And as touches my personal share in the publication of an "indecent book called *Jurgen*"—though, indeed, I hear that a great deal of the Biography is "indecent,"—it is in the end by my book that I must be condemned or justified, rather than by what anyone, including me, may for some while to come elect to say about my book, which is the Biography. So I say nothing. For against the explicit charge of having violated the current morality of 1920, I think, any serious defence would be waste of effort, if only because the question must so soon, and in fact already tends to, become of purely antiquarian interest. Our children may not improve, even from the standpoint of humor, upon our moral standards, but our children will certainly not retain them.

When, as must inevitably happen before very long, our present ethical criteria have come to seem as quaint as those of the Druids or the Etruscans, or even as the flyblown and rococo axioms of 1913 appear nowadays, offences against any one of these outmoded codes will hardly be esteemed worth talking about. Should *Jurgen* be remembered ten years hence, it will, through being remembered, be amply exonerated: whereas if *Jurgen* be forgotten, the book will then of course be violating nobody's moral sensibility. Time thus lies under bond to silence, whether with praise or with oblivion, every conceivable sort of "moral" aspersion; and willy-nilly I must defer to time.

None the less do I still believe that *Jurgen* is, as originally labelled, "a book wherein each man will find what his nature enables him to see": and when anyone confesses that he finds therein only "offensiveness, and lasciviousness, and lewdness, and indecency," I must make bold to take the announcement as a less candid summary of the book's nature than of the critic's.

§ 47

What can be done, people very often ask of me, with a flattering if misplaced assumption of my ability to answer,—what can be done toward restraining our present literary saturnalia of prudish-

ness? And I must answer, if at all, with a shrug: for the intelligent here contend against well-meaning and courageous persons who fight for high aims. The most fantastic feature of this droll year-long warring is the profound sincerity of the participants, upon both sides. You and I may know—and welcome, as the saying runs,—that we are in the right so far as goes the unhuman abstraction called rationality. But the officers and backers of the Clean Book League and of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, also, quite honestly believe they are engaged in praiseworthy work when, to cite but two farces from the exhaustless repertoire, they hale Petronius and *Mademoiselle de Maupin* into the police courts.

Indeed they appear inebriated to these antics by much the same real love of virtue which incites a portion of their congeners to burn an unruly negro as a torch to illumine their reprehension of lawlessness; and drives yet others to express their disfavor of intemperance by decreeing that wine is a compound too atrocious to be employed for any purpose except to symbolize the blood of Christ. In the face of so many laudable intentions thus obscurely communicated, we can but deduce, I am afraid, that whenever stupidity and high morals pig together they beget an offspring doubly cursed with zealotry and toxic aphasia. Nor, of course, does it appear

quite unblasphemous to contend against these presumably ordained phenomena.

At all events, those who believe the artist has any "rights" are in the negligible minority. I hardly need to explain why the bashaws of such orgiastic societies have embattled back of them the complacent muddle-headedness of that "solid" upper middle-class which pays pew-rent, and which from the first has rather fretfully resented any talk about æsthetics. Dr. Paul E. More,[1] in one of the letters relative to the *Jurgen* imbroglio, has nicely summed up this popular point of view: "I am not at all in sympathy with a group of writers who would take any protest against the Society as a justification of what they are pleased to call art. The harm done by the Society seems to me very slight, whereas the harm done by the self-styled artist may be very great."

Now that is really the popular and, therefore, the most exalted moral attitude. For the morality of a republic is, after all, a matter of elementary arithmetic: and one counts the ballots (sometimes, here and there, it is said, quite honestly) in order to distinguish between right and wrong, because the voice of the people is notoriously the voice of God. And time and again this divine orality has proclaimed that the American peerage of nature's noblemen

[1] Archæologist of the period. Mencken has several mentions of him.

does not want to be bothered with any nonsense about literature and art: for the reasons, first, that such fripperies play no part in honest poll-tax-payers' lives; and, second, that in very much the manner of this Dr. More, our reputable citizenry—obscurely and inarticulately, but none the less genuinely,—resents the impudence of "self-styled artists" who presume to know more than their betters about "what they are pleased to call art."

And here, I must protest, our more reputable citizens are wholly in the right. I think they feel, without ever quite perceiving, the innumerous dangers, for the reputable, which lurk in this continual playing with piety and common-sense. The artist, they dimly feel, is up to something which—somehow—threatens them and their security: and in this, I repeat, they are wholly right. If art were not very cruelly restrained it would empoison and wreck all civilizations, not here to speak of reordering heaven. But there is no need to worry, because art, as it happens, is always, and probably always will be, just thus restrained, by the inefficiency of the artist. So art may never ruin America, after all.

It seems, in any case, eminently appropriate that in our National Hall of Statuary, along with such world-famous statesmen and shapers of human destiny as Jacob Collamer, S. J. Kirkwood and George L. Shoup, the sole representative of our art

and letters should to-day be General Lew Wallace; for *Ben-Hur* is really the perfected expression of the best-thought-of American ideals in literature. And it is equally appropriate, I like to think, that, when judged by these ideals, *Jurgen* and all the rest of the Biography should be decreed "offensive, and lascivious, and lewd, and indecent. . . ."

Well! a good deal of this I said (over and over again) before the courts decided that *Jurgen* had been incarcerated for twenty-one months, as an "indecent" book, through error. . . . And I have not anything to add or to retract. Still, the affair has left me, I cannot but suspect, with a bias against the Puritan tradition and its adherents. I feel, indeed, that much of what I have just written down does not over-cloyingly reek of loving-kindness toward—in Swinburne's phrase,—"the barbarian sect from whose inherited and infectious tyranny this nation is as yet imperfectly delivered." So I dismiss the Puritans and their latter-day flowering in Henry Adams, in favor of a noticeably different person. I turn instead to M. Anatole France, as affording a clear illustration of the point I have in mind; and as perfectly illustrating my point as to the most diverting of all themes which thought can play with, in *La Rôtisserie de la Reine Pédauque.*

## § 48

What one first notes about *La Rôtisserie de la Reine Pédauque,* as I have elsewhere observed, is the fact that in this ironic and subtle book is presented a "story" which is remarkable for its innocence of subtlety and irony. Abridge the "plot" into a synopsis, and you will find your digest to be what is manifestly the outline of a straightforward, plumed romance by the elder Dumas.

Indeed, Dumas would have handled to a nicety the "strange surprising adventures" of Jacques Tournebroche, if only Dumas had ever thought to have his collaborators write this brisk tale, wherein d'Astarac and Tournebroche and Mosaïde display, even now, a noticeable something in common with the Balsamo and Gilbert and Althotas of the *Mémoires d'un Médicin.* One foresees, to be sure, that, with the twin-girthed Creole for guide, M. Jérôme Coignard would have waddled into our affections not quite as we know him, but with somewhat more of a fraternal resemblance to the Dom Gorenflot of *La Dame de Monsoreau* and *Les Quarante-Cinq;* and that the blood of the abbé's deathwound could never have bedewed the book's final pages, in the teeth of Dumas' economic unwillingness ever to despatch any character who could be used in a sequel.

And one thinks rather kindlily of the *Rôtisserie* as Dumas would have equipped it. . . . Yes, in reading this book, it is the most facile and least avoidable of mental exercises to prefigure how excellently Dumas would have contrived this book,—somewhat as in the reading of Mr. Joseph Conrad's novels a many of us are haunted by the sense that the Conrad "story" is, in its essential beams and stanchions, the sort of thing which W. Clark Russell used to put together, in a rather different way, for our illicit perusal. Whereby I only mean that such seafaring was illicit in those aureate days when, Cleveland being consul for the second time, your geography figured as the screen of fictive reading-matter during school hours.

One need not say that here is no question, in either case, of "imitation," far less of "plagiarism"; nor need one, surely, point out the impossibility of anybody's ever mistaking the *Rôtisserie* for a novel by Alexandre Dumas. Ere Homer's eyesight began not to be what it had been, the fact was noted by the observant Chian, that very few sane architects commence an edifice by planting and rearing the oaks which are to compose its beams and stanchions. You take over all such supplies ready hewn, and choose by preference time-seasoned timber. Since Homer's prime a host of other great creative writers have recognized this axiom when they too began to build:

and "originality" has by ordinary been, like chess and democracy, a Mecca for little minds.

Besides, there is the vast difference that M. Anatole France has introduced into the Dumas theatre some pre-eminently un-Dumas-like stage-business: the characters, between assignations and combats, toy amorously with ideas. That is the difference which at a stroke dissevers them from any helter-skelter character in Dumas as utterly as from any of our clearest thinkers in office.

It is this toying, this series of mental amourettes, which incommunicably "makes the difference" in almost all the volumes of M. France familiar to me; but our affair is with this one story. Now in this vivid book we have our fill of color and animation and gallant strangenesses, and a stir of characters who impress us as living with a poignancy unmastered as yet by anybody's associates in flesh and blood. We have, in brief, all that Dumas could ever offer, here utilized not to make drama but background, all being woven into a bright undulating tapestry behind an erudite and battered figure,—a figure of odd medleys, in which the erudition is combined with much of Autolycus, and the unkemptness with something of à Kempis. For what one remembers of the *Rôtisserie* is l'Abbé Jérôme Coignard; and what one remembers, ultimately, about Coignard is not his crowded career, however opulent in lar-

cenous and lectual escapades and fisticuffs and broached wineflasks, but his religious meditations, wherein a merry heart does, quite actually, go all the way.

Coignard I take to be a peculiarly rare type of man (there is no female of this species), the type that is genuinely interested in religion. In that his mind is actually at grapple with the most diverting of all themes, he stands apart. He halves little with the staid majority of us who sociably contract our sacred tenets from our neighbors like a sort of theological measles. He halves nothing whatever with our more earnest-minded juniors who—perennially discovering that all religions thus far put to the test of nominal practise have, whatever their paradisial entrée, resulted in a deplorable earthly hash,—perennially run yelping into the shrill agnosticism which believes only that one's neighbors should not be permitted to believe in anything.

The creed of Coignard is more urbane: "Always bear in mind that a sound intelligence rejects everything that is contrary to reason, except in matters of faith, where it is necessary to believe blindly." Your opinions are thus all-important, your physical conduct is largely a matter of taste, in a philosophy which ranks affairs of the mind immeasurably above the gross accidents of matter. Indeed, man can win to heaven only through repentance, and the initial

step toward repentance is to do something to repent of. There is no flaw in this logic, and in its clear lighting such abrogations of parochial and transitory human laws as may be suggested by reason, and the consciousness that nobody is looking, take on the aspect of divinely appointed duties.

## § 49

Some dullard may here object that M. France could not himself have believed all this while writing the book, and that it was with an ironic glitter in his ink he recorded these dicta. To which the obvious answer would be that M. France (again, like all great creative writers) is an ephemeral and negligible person beside his more permanent puppets; and that, moreover, to reason thus is, it may be precipitately, to disparage the plumage of birds on the ground that an egg has no feathers. . . . Whatever M. France may have believed, our concern is here with the conviction of M. Coignard that his religion is all-important and all-significant. And I find it curious to observe how unerringly the abbé's thoughts aspire, from no matter what remote and low-lying starting point, to the loftiest niceties of religion and the high thin atmosphere of ethics. Sauce spilt upon his collar is but a reminder of the influence of clothes upon our moral being, and of how terrify-

ingly is the destiny of each person's soul dependent upon such trifles; a glass of light white wine leads, not, as we are nowadays taught to believe, to instant ruin, but to edifying considerations of the life and glory of St. Peter; and a pack of cards suggests, straightway, intransigent fine points of martyrology. Always this churchman's thoughts deflect to the most interesting of themes, to the relationship between God and His children, and what familiary etiquette may be necessary to preserve the relationship unstrained. These problems alone engross Coignard unfailingly, even when the philosopher has had the ill luck to fall simultaneously into drunkenness and a public fountain; and retains so notably his composure between the opposed assaults of fluidic unfriends.

What, though, is found the outcome of this philosophy, appears a question to be answered with wariness of empiricism. None can deny that Coignard says, when he lies dying: "My son, reject, along with the example I gave you, the maxims which I may have proposed to you during my period of life-long folly. Do not listen to those who, like myself, subtilize over good and evil." Yet this is just one low-spirited moment, as set against the preceding fifty-two high-hearted years. And the utterance wrung forth by this moment is, after all, merely that sentiment which seems the inevitable bedfellow

of the moribund,—"Were I to have my life over again, I would live differently." The sentiment is familiar and venerable, but its truthfulness has not yet been attested.

To the considerate, therefore, it may appear expedient to dismiss Coignard's trite winding-up of a half-century of splendid talking, as just the infelicitous outcropping, in the dying man's enfeebled condition, of an hereditary foible. And when moralizing would approach an admonitory forefinger to the point that Coignard's manner of living brought him to die haphazardly, among preoccupied strangers at a casual wayside inn, you do, there is no questioning it, recall that a more generally applauded manner of living has been known to result in a more competently arranged-for demise, under the best churchly and legal auspices, through the rigors of crucifixion.

So it becomes the part of wisdom to waive these mundane riddles, and to consider instead the justice of Coignard's fine epitaph, wherein we read that "living without worldly honors, he earned for himself eternal glory." The statement may (with St. Peter keeping the gate) have been challenged in paradise; but in literature at all events, the unhonored life of Jérôme Coignard has clothed him with glory of tolerably longeval looking texture. It is true that this might also be said of Iago and Tartuffe, but

then we have Balzac's word for it that merely to be celebrated is not enough. Rather is the highest human desideratum twofold,—*D'être célebré et d'être aimé*. And that much Coignard promises to be for a long while.

§ 50

The thoughts of M. Jérôme Coignard, then,—here somewhat to retrace my argument,—untiringly return to the most diverting of all themes, to the relationship between God and His children, and what familiary etiquette seems most adapt to keep that relationship an affable one. I know that religion is, just now, rather out-of-date. I know that nowadays a great deal of atheism is going about among the foolish and unreflective. But we may wiseliest, I am sure, put out of mind the notion of there being no God, and of the dead finding beyond the black door at the end of the gray corridor, that silver-handled door which is the sole exit from our workaday existence, nothing whatever. Even if one would, upon the whole, prefer to find there nothing, here it remains, in every sense, a rather wasteful parade of agnosticism to admit the existence of nothing.

It is wasteful because no diversion is to be had of thinking about nothing. But any amount of diversion can be gained from meditation upon the

strange realms beyond the tomb for which we may, quite conceivably, all be en route: for in this place also is the proffered lure that ageless aspiration toward lands which are in nothing familiar.

These conjectural kingdoms were, of course, the earliest chosen subject matter for poetic adornment everywhere: poets were, of course, the first to guess at what it would be most interesting to find beyond the black door: and every ancient religion, again, of course, grew up from people indulging in the two habits, now equally antique, of reciting poetry and of taking it seriously. They had at least the excuse that this poetry was magnificent, because in surveying and populating these post mortem countries the creating romanticist has displayed his most imposing reach of power. . . . Here he, indeed, has need of power: for he is here intent to make sport with his third great opponent, and to play with death; intent to bereave the tyrant of all terribleness, intent to color roseately the dreadful face of doom, intent to detect in the skeleton's multidentate grinning a smile of reassurance. He has done this, handsomely.

—Though, to be sure, these promised paradises are fugacious: over and over again has the Scriptural prophecy been fulfilled as to the heavens being rolled up like a scroll, and one by one the heavens pass away with no greater noise than is made by the staid

commentaries of ethnologists. For a winter that will have no ending has oppressed the blissful fields of Aälu: the proud castle of Nin-kigal is pulled down, its seven gates are fallen away into dust; and only pedants now and then recall the lion-guarded golden thrones whereon sat crowned, and endowed with eternal youth, the chief ones and the sages of Babylon. Manannan holds court no more in Emhain. Instead, he amicably shares his somewhat lowlier estate in nothingness with Oannes and Ahura-Mazda; for all of these well know to-day that all promised paradises are fugacious. . . . Nor may the noblest of heroes any longer win to Xisuthros and that most lovely, nameless land, "at the mouth of the rivers," wherein contentment had no wasting away under the nibbling of time, and human grief was like the fragment of some word in a torn manuscript written in a language which no man any more remembers. The white vase of Thoth is broken, also: he has no need of it to-day, he has desisted from the weighing and the taxing of ghostly imports, now that the narrow bridge which led across the abyss to Sraosha's thousand-pillared palace upon Demavend, has for some while been closed to traffic. For these promised paradises are really very fugacious. . . . So the carved and shining house of E-Sagila is decayed; and Olympos may not claim to oversee and rule the doings of gods and men from a

rather modest official altitude of 9,754 feet. Only the professorial in quest of solar myths now care to thrust and poke, like rag-pickers, among the dust-heaps that were Gimli and Audlang and Vidblain: and time strips every paradise alike of its delights and its believers. Yet, at forty-five, one does not really marvel at the flying of felicity anywhence. And so it seems a stranger pillagement that all the hells, which once were the fine thriving homes of bale and anguish, have been by time's dilapidation bereft of every little discomfort. For the ice of Nifleheim is melted: the dreadful flames of Tartarus have spluttered out like damp firecrackers: even Aratu, wherein reigned mere oblivion, has been swallowed by oblivion. . . . Poets build against eternity sometimes in dealing with trifles; but never in erecting the eternal homes of men.

Meanwhile it is most gratifying to reflect that, while they lasted, the glories and the terrors of all this celestial architecture divertingly filled many lives with spiritual consolation and salutary dread; have checked extravagance in the way of bloodletting or of chastity or of whatever at the time was vice; have heartened the devout to eat their parents or to burn infidels or to give alms, or to do whatever else at the time was virtue; and have evolved their countless hierarchies of saints and holy persons. Here is no room for irony. Nuns, doubtless, have assumed

the veil and entered convents in a religious exaltation as lofty as that with which the virgins of Assyria put on the crown of little cords and went to the temple of Mylitta and their first communion with the first amorous male passer-by. Yet, to uphold the splendors of the paradise of Mohammed his Mussulmans have waged religious wars with a malignity not often surpassed by the servitors of Christ: and Solomon may well have gazed upon the completed Temple, and have beheld the ark of the covenant of the Lord brought in unto the most holy place under the wings of the cherubim, in very much that pious joy with which, from high Tenochtitlan, rapt priests looked down upon the slowly advancing line, two stately miles in length, of warriors who ascended to disembowelment upon the jasper altar of Huitzilopochtli. In fine, these hells and paradises, the while that their bright evanescence lasted, have provided employment, and support, and recreation, and exalted sentiments to boot, for innumerable millions.

Even so, in populating these worlds, the romanticist has been tardy ever to imagine the gods as other than sinister and, as a rule, detestable beings. You see, the creature stays incurably logical, he is as faithful to logic as was Florian de Puysange in the old story, and he reasons from effect to cause. The romanticist has thus from the first been unable to

conceive of this world, which he found, upon the whole, abominable, as being the creation of any other sort of Demiurge, or as being ruled by any other sort of overlords. In all heathen theogonies heaven is thus the home of every pravity in the way of lust and greed, of deceit and cruelty and plain childishness; and looms as a mysteriously splendid court of rogues and paphians presided over by a supreme tyrant, who is also a master-rogue. This formula was, very gradually, improved upon by Hebraic poets, who in particular recolored all anaphrodisiacally: so that the Old Testament presents, by and large, a rather novel and a more strait-laced notion of the Demiurge and his immediate entourage; with only here and there, in passages about the sons of God and the daughters of men, and more embarrassingly in the stories of Eve and Sarah, the unedited, unexpurgated, unrecolored legend of divine amours left, to consideration, apparent.

§ 51

But about the Jahveh-Elohim of the Old Testament, who remains by tacit admission the God the Father of the New Testament, I really prefer here not to speak at all. I find it far too difficult to resist an unfair bias in the favor of any target of so many assaults. For His present embarrassment is not

merely that Colonel William Jennings Bryan [1] and the Reverend William Ashley Sunday [2] have ruthlessly united to compromise Him with their praise: even the state legislators of Tennessee and Oklahoma, and Florida, have officially endorsed Him in His difference of opinion with Charles Darwin, and rest vociferant in Zion. . . . Outside, is a troubling babblement about tribal deities and Babylonian myths, and a rather distressing tendency to discuss the birth of Christ from Joseph's point of view. Meanwhile the ordained and inescapable clergy are at pains to suggest that in His official revelations the Lord God of Sabaoth, like the dear, queer, overmodest old fellow He is, has branded Himself with uncommitted atrocities; and in their denials of any really grave wrong-doing, commend Him in terms as high as were, from any pulpit, ever applied to a prohibition agent detected in embezzlement. And meanwhile too, among the advanced young, there is much superior sniffing at His bloodthirstiness and variability of mind, at Jonah's great fish and the bears of Elisha, at Noah's raven and Adam's rib. And I find it droll to reflect that the deity who was everywhere trusted and worshipped in my youth is to-day as little regarded as Jupiter Stator or Marduk of the Bright Glance.

[1] Of the Third Nebraska Volunteer Infantry.
[2] Itinerant clergyman of the day, who preached a species of Christianity.

And to me His downfall seems in some ways rather sad. For, as I recall it, He was not thought of as being particularly cruel and dreadful—any longer. And the Old Testament was accepted in its entirety and without any especial difficulty in the Virginia of that day, wherein almost all other generally respected elderly gentlemen had been, as a matter of public knowledge, rather wild in their youth. . . . As I recall it, there was a prevalent feeling that God had some while since settled down, in very much the manner of your grandfather; and that the Amalekites and the Hittites and all those other demolished persons were in some way connected with the hundreds of Yankee soldiers whom, for equally inexplicable but assuredly good causes, your grandfather had killed so long before you were born. Thus there was no large difficulty about our Episcopalian Jehovah, and really no terribleness. . . .

And I sometimes incline to question if this god—with wild oats undeniably sown and harvested in the past, but with a prevailing disposition nowadays to be agreeable, subject always to His not having been of late upset by one or another mysterious grown-up affair,—was not, after all, the most plausible sort of demiurge I have yet heard of. He still seems to me the likeliest creator, upon the whole, to have fashioned, it may be in some moment of youth-

ful indiscretion and effusion, such as elsewhere had resulted in people having mulatto cousins, the wholly incomprehensible world we live in. . . . And essentially, I find, I still believe in Him, with a faith that undermines and goes deeper than mere reason because it was developed in me earlier. During thunderstorms this faith assumes especial vigor: and while I do not presume to think all this terrific display was got up solely for my benefit, the notion most certainly does flicker about me, livid and troubling, that while He has this storm in hand, and is actually passing my way, it might appear to Him mere thriftiness to use a thunderbolt in the old, practical, explicit manner. So I do not quite heartily enjoy the beauty of a thunderstorm. . . . But the point is that this demiurge also conformed to the great general rule. The point is that men have not ever, at any time, pictured the benevolence of their gods and creators as being anything like a good risk; and that no mythology has ever told of such gods as would in strict logic seem apt to be foreplanning a pleasant future for anybody.

None the less, here also, men have very manfully forced that slippery shirk optimism to help out with logic's work. And so have men always been assured that these overlords would by and by arrange everything satisfactorily; and that the door at the far end of the corridor opened, when you also had done with

alcoves, and when you also had perforce passed through, upon one or another delightful vista. The fact has been divinely revealed, or in any event has the authentic Ingoldsbean support of one or another leading citizen who "well remembers to have heard his grandmother say that 'Somebody told her so.' " . . . And men have preferred to accept the revelation rather than to recollect that, by all current accounts, the deity accredited with this revelation is not elsewhere remarkable for truthful dealings. Men have, out of so many thousand years of speculation, contrived no surer creed than Coignard's creed, that "in matters of faith it is necessary to believe blindly." Men have discovered no firmer hope than that, in defiance of all logic and of all human experience, something very pleasant may still be impending, in—need I say?—bright lands which are in nothing familiar.

# VI

# ROMANTICS ABOUT THEM

"He has more authorities than those whose names he has given. These are, however, a few: Alcmæon of Crotona; Dionysius of Apollonia; Herodorus of Heracleum in Pontus, the father of Bryson the sophist; Ctesias of Cnidos; Herodotus of Halicarnassus; Syennesis of Cyprus; Polybus; Democritus of Abdera; Anaxagoras of Clazomene; Empedocles of Sicily; and many more which do not just now occur to my memory."

## 6.

## *Romantics About Them*

§ 52

THE literary artist plays, I repeated, with death. But I had not meant only in a religious way: I had not meant merely that the artist lovingly carves the beads, and polishes the rhetoric of the prayer-books, with which not merely the aged delight to play in turn. And I had not meant, either, to dwell so long upon orthodox religious diversions, since reputable religion is of necessity, like any other popular fashion, an ever-varying unstable affair.

One sect alone—made up of true believers in the everywhere underlying, and the really religious principle, as I interpreted it, of the Biography,—seemed not ever to have varied in its faith. I was thinking of the immodest, impotent, and internecine sect of literary artists. And I could, I believed, best indicate the two main tenets of the literary artist's religion by a rather roundabout approach.

## § 53

For chance, no great while earlier, had condemned me to sit by and listen to a pair of notably successful authors in what, at that time, had seemed a preposterous talk. This talk, a little, troubles memory even now. . . . For they were not at all heeding me. These two when they forgather effuse a naïve effect of emperors meeting, incognito and with a relished casting off of formality, in a world of underlings. Each one of them is, in fact, too fair a judge of literature to depreciate in anything an admirable book on account of his own name being upon the title-page: and if these two endure each other excellently, it is because each loyally esteems the other to be the next to the most wondrous of American writers, and affects some modest reticence as to the first choice.

The scene was the library of one of them, the period after dinner. The visiting author had but now looked up from where his polychromatic volumes were gaily marshalled (with a perhaps not unpremeditated conspicuousness) toward a shelf across the way, a shelf whereon the host's own books more sombrely convened. The two men had, I repeat, quite recently eaten and had drunk with some thoroughness. They were replete and a bit drowsy. All earthly worries and obligations stood for the

moment aloof. Both men had reached their later forties; both were done alike with actual fervors and with real self-distrust; and each, I am certain, is assured, in his private meditations, of a tolerably permanent sort of fame.

"We," said the visitor, the while that he, reflectively, thus looked from the backbones of the one set of books to those of the other, "we have been lucky."

"I wonder?" said the host. . . .

"Yes," stated the first and (upon the whole) the fatter of the two speakers, "for we have got what we wanted, without paying the full price. We might have been poor Dowson or Villon, you know—"

"Or any other of the mighty poets in their misery and customary attics dead? I always wondered how they managed to stuff the broken window pane with a pair of trousers, though—"

But the visitor was talking unfrivolously. "Yes, the world's full of talent. Talent is nothing. Genius is nothing. These congenital amateurs who have nothing but genius give me a pain." He specified the corporal location of this pain. He continued: "It is the getting what you want that counts. And we have got a great deal—"

"I grant it: we belong, we also, to the race of go-getters. But then the bargain, I suspect, was for cash payment."

Now for an instant, through the two pairs of big round spectacles, as if with the magnified eyes of somewhat torpid insects, the two men were looking each at the other, in a slow sort of shared and unmirthful amusement. They said nothing. Then the visitor went on:

"Yes, we have paid a great deal, too. Still, here at almost fifty we have rather charming homes and bank accounts, and wives that continue to put up with us; and the books are done, quite as we wanted them done. There aren't many of us, you know: not many S. O. B.'s contrive to say that much unsmashed. No: we haven't paid for doing those books the full and usual price. We have slipped by, somehow—"

The other surmised pensively: "You mean, by that big Thing that doesn't approve of our getting our books done? I hadn't guessed He bothers you."

After a request for deific condemnation of the third personal singular neuter pronoun, the visitor stated he meant all the Things. "They don't like us, you know. They're as vicious as the bright young men."

"It *is* droll, how They seem," the host conceded, "to lurk behind you somewhere, watching, waiting, and—that's the worst,—so able to wait. They don't have, you see, to hurry. But you have to. So, with

every book, when I unwrap the advance copies, I always feel, Well, I got that one done, anyway!"

"And we've slipped by Them!"

"So far," the other amended. And he exhibited his fingers crossed.

Whereon the visitor mentioned the infernal regions, with an outbreak of rolling, oleaginous, wholly unreticent laughter. And he said exultantly: "But I'm forty-seven! And sixteen books are done the way I god-damn wanted them done! They can begin on me, now, when They are ready."

The host, however, looked disapproving. "I wish you would be a little more tactful about Them. This is my library, you know. I really, you know, would rather not have anything said here to attract Their particular attention to the place. You see, only next month I am all of forty-nine, and there are one or two other books I want to do here."

Both of these aging romantics seemed quite in earnest. . . .

## § 54

They were talking, I reflected, the most incomprehensible of nonsense. A whit later, though, I believe, I understood these not unpompous and, from some aspects, not utterly underisible nor unpathetic fiction-mongers. For, as I now construe it, they talked of that formidable three with whom the artist plays and

makes his troubled sport. They talked,—they also, I believe,—of common-sense and piety and death. And so to these oldsters some slight periphrases seemed called for, since, in their own romanticizing eyes (as I interpret it), they went as rebels under the fitful surveillance of powers that do not deal tenderly with rebels.

They felt themselves to have escaped quite unaccountably, thus far. Besides, at best, you went to each day's typing a bit precariously, having only the stiffening fingers of this undependable middle-aged body to work with, nowadays, in a world wherein, according to the morning paper, your juniors were every day evincing such inconsideration for your natural feelings, by dropping down with apoplexies and heart seizures. . . . Well, by and by would come the unavoidable, with its concomitant indecent exposure of the partially done book on which you would then be typing. And people, viewing it, would perforce decide that your mind had preceded you in your departure, for people would not comprehend that only in the last revisions could you knit together the loose ends with verbal love-knots. Meanwhile you went about the one thing you, nowadays, knew how to do, typing, always typing, in a continuous tête-à-tête with this indeterminate tapped-out tattoo of ticktocking types and tinklings. For you were intent upon getting a fair copy of what might yet be

finished, intent to get down what might yet be permanently phrased, if only They did not strike in time for to-morrow's paper. . . .

Yes, I, upon reflection, seemed to understand those aging romantics' odd air of furtiveness—and the blustering, too.

## § 55

For the aim of art is, to the one side, an illegal economy and a thievish sortie upon oncoming times' remembrance. . . . This, to be sure, is the less important of the artist's bifold endeavors. "Fame" and "immortality" rank in all moderately clear eyes (for reasons to which I shall recur) as but the stakes that, with favoring luck, may be won at this game which the clear-eyed play in chief for diversion. The artist, even so, does undeniably strive for these stakes; sometimes indeed he (foolishly enough) thinks his "immortality" a really important hazard: and his art becomes a form of freebooting rebellion, in a world whose polity foredooms all men to perish utterly as far as go their earthly relics. . . . Yet none the less does the literary artist mutinously attempt to avoid the appointed customs of obliteration; and he tacks with a harried and piratical shiftiness about the quiet haven wherein his betters—the far-seeing statesmen and the Federal judges, the bankers and the writers of book reviews and the big-sleeved

bishops and the best known of moving-picture actors,—all enter every day and law-abidingly cast anchor, among the wharfs of Lethe. For his despairing, futile aim is to economize and—herewith to remit that perhaps over-colored buccaneerish simile, in favor of a more cadaverous figure,—to embalm as lastingly as may be, where time flows like a cool and steady wind and all else is vapor, his personal notions. Yet, somewhere, may be watching him, as to the mazed artist is whispered by what seems a nameless and troubled instinct, somewhere may be incuriously observing his rebellion, a power which that instinct fears as the calm foe of human presumption. Somewhere may exist supernally an all-overbrooding common-sense aware that the upshot of any man's life is a matter most profitably forgotten. And this high common-sense (endowed perhaps with plenary executive duties) may well be one of Them. . . .

§ 56

To the other side, the artist seeks and goes always seeking—unpatriotically, if not with absolute irreligion,—to divert himself in his native universe, whose constitution does not self-evidently provide for the amusement of the inhabitants. No artist's long-faced magniloquence about "his work," I must for the hundredth or so time repeat, can in the least pre-

vent that vocation being in reality, and only, his diversion. . . . And a very striking attestation of this truth, now I think of it, is furnished by the failure of such talk for one half-instant to delude the man's wife. For women have, as some profound philosopher or another has observed, their intuitions. The woman whom marriage with a creative artist has swindled of a husband thus always knows, or she at worst obscurely feels, that behind those locked doors the humbug is at a sort of secret tippling: and for that reason (among others) you will find the wife of every valid artist to regard his art, however tacitly, however self-perjuringly even, with unconcealable impatience. . . .

So much is true, I believe, of all the arts. The endeavor of the really serious creative writer, in any case, is hourly to divert himself: and, pending extinction, he intends to continue to divert himself with such fancies as he elects. The man, as I have admitted, lies about it, through, one would like to think, some remnants of shame. Or perhaps it is by his publishers alone that the besotted hedonist is restrained from answering those critics who deplore his fancies, or who pick fault with his chosen manner of expressing them: "What is that to me? and how am I concerned with your likings and your dislikings? These notions divert me. I have set them forth in the fashion which I personally found most

diverting. Why, as we meet here, momentarily, doomed prisoners in the death-cell of existence, should I be bothering about your taste in anæsthetics? Mix, in your own god's name, whatever drugs you like, to keep you firm in magnanimity until you too are summoned to that last hackneyed journalistic hearty breakfast of ham and eggs and to the other clichés of being killed. Meanwhile I stick to my approved strong tipple."

So then—not quite out of rash hilarity,—does the creating writer intoxicate himself with such self-brewed imaginings as he finds most effective: so does he flout perforce the opinions of his fellow citizens, the while that he creates a more approvable race in his own image: and so does he dismiss, half negligently, the material cosmos as rather bungling prentice work, in very little exemplifying the rules which he himself prefers as demiurge. As Hecuba to Hamlet, so to him is the knowledge that such creatures as "realists" are everywhere truckling to nature in their tenth large editions, and go enfranchised in these books to patch up a mimic existence in every respect as undesirable as their own. . . . For the creating romanticist quite simply declines to accept either the human conduct of life upon earth or any assumable theocratic overseeing of it from heaven as a competent performance. Men and whatever gods may potter about in charge of men this

myopic weakling unaffectedly esteems to be not at all up to his standards. Yet, none the less, somewhere from afar may be watching him—as, here again, seems whispered by irrational instinct,—a power which exacts, without any pliable descent into logic, that its material handiwork be approached with the civil condonations of piety. . . . That power may well be the second of Them. And by this ruthless but unangered power perhaps the babbling runagate must always be punished, in one way or another, for his disloyalties to his fellows and to his native overlords. Such was the feeling, I believe, which fidgeted in the bottom of the minds of my replete, romantic oldsters,—the both of them well-nigh used up, it might be, but both unsmashed, and both unrepentantly aware of not having been, in common with the most of their contemporaries, wasted,—as they drowsed among their finished books. For, whatever happened, that many of their books were finished. . . .

## § 57

Why then, though, granting these delusions,—the sane may reasonably inquire,—should any madman seek to provoke this punishment, and even court it with painstakings and with year-long self-denials? The reply to that question is simple: I do not know.

I doubt if anybody does. Nor, I imagine, had either of these paunched and spectacled and thin-haired fanatics, blinking among his finished books, the leisure for such, upon the whole, irrelevant problems. . . . It would merely seem, I daresay, to his romanticizing time-bleared eyes, that single-mindedness, if but occasionally, if but for a brief while as go the necessaries of high-wrought prose, may evade Them. It would seem to him that, in this grudged, snatched while, he, somehow,—in part through less of crass ill luck than daily tumbles mere genius graveward, and in part, too, through wasting no least moment upon irrelevant matters,—had contrived to get some of his books completed in more or less the shape he had wanted, with that irrational, inborn, resistless hunger which made the other matters irrelevant. . . . And then you would be almost as grateful for as you were worried by the unaccountable way in which you would seem still to be slipping by Them, somehow, and thus far. And so at times you would bluster to keep up your courage. And at other times you would cross your fingers. . . . For, really, in the last forties, with those depressing items in the paper every morning, you might with an equal sense of assurance be typing, always typing, on a battlefield to a distracting accompaniment of burst shells. And each new book completed by you would thus take on an element of the miraculous not wholly based upon

the volume's contents: and you would, in point of fact, quite probably unwrap the first actual copies saying, with rather more of wonder than of gloating, "Well, I got that one done, anyway!"

For about the third of Them there is no doubt nor any possible disputing. And it is against common-sense and piety and death that the artist conducts his utterly futile rebellion. . . . Yes, I believe, I understood those aging romantics, who approached the colophon of so many books.

## § 58

—Because, I submit, it is wholly conceivable that men may, by and by, get rid of common-sense and piety; but this human habit of dying appears ineradicable. There is always ahead, and always a little nearer, the one and one only exit from the familiar corridor of our workaday existence. All of us thus pass, futilely, nesciently, helplessly, through tedium to horror: for we live *in articulo mortis;* our doings here, when unaffectedly regarded, are but the restlessness of a prolonged demise; and the birth-cry of every infant announces the beginning of the death-agony. . . .

And that, too, you observe, is in the approved time-tested style. For it is through consideration of his own unimportance and transiency that man rises

to the largest resonance of poetry and wisdom Vanity of vanities! saith the Preacher, the son of David: and Æschylos answers, Oh, ye little race of men, what does your living show! and goes on with the customary observations as to parti-colored leaves that are swept away by the wind. Horace takes up the tale, We are all bound on one voyage. Villon continues with derogatory evaluations of the final worth of the fair queens and the thrasonical potentates and the melted snows of yesterday; and Shakespeare rounds off the dirge with the assertion that human living, however full of sound and fury, signifies precisely nothing. . . . Everywhere fine literature, in its more purple passages, tends to voice the futility of man's endeavors, the impermanence of his works, and his generally unarguable claims not to be worth writing about.

Nevertheless,—here to continue in this high scholastic vein,—nevertheless, as Chrysippus of Cnidos, you will remember, has strikingly phrased a weighty truth, in that noble monograph *On the Cabbage* (which some critics of the Alexandrian school, as we should of course with due caution bear in mind, would attribute to a somewhat later date and to a pupil of Erasistratus),—nevertheless, death is the one impending fact which is certain. Now thought of in its physical aspects, death is an indignity before which any sort of human self-respect—

not here to speak of the wild actuality of human pride,—becomes preposterous. Thought about logically, it makes any conceivable human action rather silly, as upon the whole inappropriate to condemned persons in a death cell. Thought of in the light of man's possible immortality, it seems no longer to raise, if ever it did, any positive enthusiasm. And so beyond doubt the majority of us act wiseliest by not thinking about it at all, except as a thing which happens to other people.

And it is perhaps inadequate comfort to reflect that the one world known to us, wherein everything exists by virtue of destruction, can hardly be described as a realm of life rather than of death. As I write, I can observe, in the long field across the roadway, our family cow indefatigably grazing in the level light of sunset, a stolid Gothic monster whose placid conduct of existence I have sometimes envied. . . . More often, though, have I frowningly gazed out of the library window, in search of some elusive word, to find the creature tirelessly munching forward, and never for one instant having to use her brain; and then I have suspected that cow of being a really competent literary critic. . . . Well, the grass is, as we say, alive, and by its death she is being nourished. And it is rather vexatious to reflect that this cow will probably for some time be retained as the source of our milk supply. Other-

wise I could go on to moralize how she will presently become steaks and roasts, to furnish me with nutriment through her cenatical interment; and how I in a little while shall be dead and nourishing new grasses for her descendants to feed on; and how the cycle of grass, cow and man will thus go on interminably and, some say, aimlessly. It could be worked up, I think, into a quite effective prose passage. Unluckily, I know I shall in every likelihood never eat that especial cow; and so my neat and edifying sermon is despoiled by the raid of commonsense, always inimical to art.

None the less do two minutes of reflection beget perturbing offspring, in shape of the knowledge that everywhere life brings about death, and death life, until the hardiest of philosophers may hardly dare assert which upon earth is prevalent. From wasp to tiger, from the eagle to the frog, all animate beings must kill ceaselessly, and eat and kill again, until they themselves be killed for another's nourishing. We may say, as we very glibly do, that the worm is the wren's food: yet it seems equally true that every wren is but a flying compost of dead worms, just as that cow yonder is, to the considerate, a heaving rick of dead hay. . . . And we human beings also are condemned to incessant killing, we are doomed to the diurnal massacre of innumerable fellow mammals, who very much excel us in some virtues, such

as patience and taciturnity, even if they be upon the whole our inferiors in malevolence and folly. I do not imagine, for example, that many persons would declare an archbishop to be as near a thorough Christian as is a lamb, or could, with an unpricking conscience, affirm a congressman to be, in every district, as intelligent as a cow.

So we all live by grace of killing, as indubitably as did any mediæval bravo or headsman. Whereso-ever, in the familiar Scriptural phrase, two or three are gathered together, there again is the customary alliance of the Bible and Shakespeare justified by the aptness of the naïve old stage direction, *Enter three murderers*. . . . Nor is it instantly apparent that an assassination is converted into righteousness by a subsequent eating of the corpse. It is an epilogue, indeed, which savors a little distastefully of the necrophile. Besides, a passionate or disinterested murder may well in many circumstances retain a certain childish grace, as befits the first invention of the first baby: a mere murder is often picturesque and, I am told, enjoyable: but that crime which is called a dinner party was never, to my knowledge, either of these things. . . . And therefore one laments this obscene crunching and devouring which, when reflected upon, abates man's proper pride in his race, and coolingly checks love and every other exalted sentiment. It is not possible to think with adoration,

or even with actual pleasure, of the most dear of ladies as the sarcophagus of fish and chicken, as the moving monument of so many mangled sheep, as the animated ossuary of oxen, as in brief a mere morgue. And man that is born of woman does literally, we see, come out of a coffin into the tedium of life, whereunder he encounters on all sides the yawning of one or another grave, in the persons of his fellow omnivora.

So by the considerate our world may hardly be described as the realm of life rather than of death. And in all lands men have obscurely felt that death was perhaps the beginning as well as the end of all things. Thus, naturally enough, you find the Northmen talking of Ymir, the slain giant, whose flesh and blood and bones decayed into our earth and sea and mountains. In India men told of the giant Purusha, from whose dead body the world was just thus mortifyingly made: in Babylon, of rotting Tiamat; in China, of P'an Ku; and in Persia, of Gayomart. Everywhere you encounter the suspicion that this world and the busy life with which it swarms reveal the phenomena attendant upon the putrefying of any other sizable carcass: among all nations the older poets have, with queer unanimity, identified mankind with the worms which breed in a puffed and bubbling corpse; and have protested that, rightly speaking, in our terrestrial existence is no-

where apparent anything save the operation and products of death.

§ 59

Yet the chelonian-footed progress of science here, as usual, has in the outcome managed to catch up with the forerunning hare-brained fancies of the poets. Astronomers are now agreed that we inhabit a world already dying, a world made tenable for parasites through the abating of its vital heat; and that our race infests earth only during the last stages of the globe's demise. We men and women in our worldly relations rank, if you be an optimist, with lice: if pessimism be your creed, you will lean to the old poetic idea of our being maggots. For the science of the astronomer does, in essentials, but revert to the most ancient notions of cosmology; finds nowhere apparent anything save the operation and products of death; and rather cheerlessly unveils the cold and murderous tides of circumambient æther, about which drift so many other moribund planets among the corpses of their fellows.

None the less, it is with this omnipresent and omnicorporeal monarch that the artist makes sport, depriving death of terrors with the opiates of religion; and maiming death of potency likewise, so long as the artist eludes destruction and survives in his art. To that attenuated, grotesque and defama-

tory survival I shall by and by come back: meanwhile I must protest, even here, that in this third struggle is no least beckoning chance of victory.

For, before common-sense or piety man figures, as I have said, in the rôle of Frankenstein; he is as Dom Manuel before the vivified image of Sesphra; and he combats, without much hope, his own terrible creation: but here, the opponent seems far more likely to have created him, however accidentally. By the fanciful may mankind, thus, be viewed as an unpremeditated by-product, as some serious task's débris, which for the moment rather clutters this corner of death's workroom. Others will play with the notion—which, as I remember, Felix Kennaston once suggested,—of life's having somehow got into the material universe as a small, alien, unwelcome interloper; and will suspect this is the reason that death appears to come upon us and our labors frowningly, as the vexed housewife comes toward the unloved weavings of the spider, just seen.

But, in either case, the poets are sonorously agreed that never while time lasts can man's existence really matter; for time, they say, is death's broom.

# VII

# DIVERSIONS OF THE ANCHORITE

"He shaved himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh. . . . And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck; and he made Joseph to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him:—'Bow the knee!' . . . And in the plenteous years the earth brought forth by handfuls."

## 7.

## *Diversions of the Anchorite*

§ 60

THE literary artist plays, I had said, with such ideas as he personally finds diverting. . . . But at this point criticism, remote but decisive, dwelt feelingly, and with, I believe, a tinge of imaginative embellishment, upon the miseries of housekeeping in establishments wherein people never could manage to be on time for their meals. For I seemed to have written through and blotted out another entire, bright, irretrievable afternoon: and rising, prior to a brief venturing into the society of human beings, I wondered how the poetically favored simile of the life of a galley-slave could ever have occurred to, of all persons, some writer or another, as representing thralldom. . . .

After supper I returned to the library: and there —with the artificial aid of electricity now, somehow symbolically, replacing the true sun,—I resumed the quest of my epilogue. . . .

To the one side, as I had pointed out, the artist seeks to divert himself with the ideas which he, whether or no he absolutely and crudely "believes in them," does personally find diverting. This is the game he chooses to play: it is the game with which, at any cost, he intends to amuse himself. And considering all things, I was really afraid that when Mr. Joseph Conrad talked about the artist being prompted by "an obscure inner necessity," we overheard the resort of a pricking conscience to pleonasm. There is nothing particularly "obscure" about our general human unwillingness to be bored: and the artist evades his boredom by playing at his art. That seemed to me all there was to it.

Let us excogitate, as a most pregnant example,—I said, with the pedantic touch befitting graver issues,—the famous case of Joseph Hergesheimer. . . .

## § 61

Now, in order to approach the most striking but one of all modern instances, and the case which in so many features, I believe, resembles my own case, I must recapitulate a great deal written a while back, when Joseph Hergesheimer was to me, in the main, a collection of some half a dozen books, and the hand which wrote them had shaken my hand not more than half a dozen times. Since then we

have become—within the limits of such confidence as remains possible and wary between creative writers,—rather intimate. . . .

But I am speaking of a time before this intimacy, and of my very first impressions of Mr. Hergesheimer as these impressions were derived from his books alone. At that time so said they, spoke they, and told they the tale, in "literary gossip," that Joseph Hergesheimer "wrote" for a long while before an iota of his typing was transmuted into proof sheets. And the tale told how for fourteen years he could find nowhere any magazine editor to whose present needs a Hergesheimer story was quite suited.

It was then, and to-day remains, my belief that, in approaching Mr. Hergesheimer's writings, one should bear constantly in mind those fourteen years, for to me they appear, not uncuriously, to have shaped and colored every book he has ever published.

The actual merit of the writing done during that period of "unavailability" is—here, at least—irrelevant. It is not the point of the fable that he high-heartedly wrote a story to which, when completed, his unbiased judgment could not quite honestly deny such deference as is due to a literary masterpiece; and which, through some odd error, was rejected by a magazine that every month was publishing vastly inferior stories; and which was later declined

by another magazine, and by a host of magazines, with a dispiriting bland unanimity not unsuggestive of editorial conspiracy. Meanwhile—of course—he had written another tale, which was much better than the first, and which proved to be an equally faithful chaperon of return postage. So story followed story, each dreeing the same weird. . . .

And he used to wait for the postman, no doubt, and to note from afar that it was a large envelope; and would open the damned thing with a faint hope that perhaps they just wanted some slight changes made; and would find only the neat, impersonal, and civilly patronizing death-warrant of hope. And Joseph Hergesheimer kept on with his foolishness, without any gleam of success, or even (they report) any word of encouragement. And doubtless his relatives said the customary things. . . .

Yet none of these circumstances, either, is the point of the apologue, because in all save one detail the comedy has been abraded into pointlessness by over-constant repetition; and is, of course, being futilely performed at this moment in one prefers not to reflect how many thousand homes. The leading rôle, though, is too unprofitable and irksome for any quite sane person to persist in enacting it for fourteen years. Here I speak with curt decision as to a subject upon which I protest myself an authority. . . . This rôle, then, Joseph Hergesheimer did

enact for fourteen years; and that is the fable's significant point.

§ 62

Yes, it is the boy's illogical pertinacity which is the fable's point, because that pertinacity at once explains why nearly all the men in Mr. Hergesheimer's books are hag-ridden by one or another sole desire which spurs them toward a definite goal, through every instant of their mimic lives. These men but variously reflect, I take it, that younger Hergesheimer's "will to write," that wholly selfish and unconquerable will. To Mr. Hergesheimer, even to-day, it probably seems natural that a man's whole living should be devoted to the attaining of one desire quite clearly perceived, because once his own life was thus dedicated. . . . The more shrewd mass of practical persons that go about in flesh are otherwise; and comfortably fritter through the day, with no larger objective at any time in mind than the catching of a car, the rounding off of a business transaction, the keeping of an engagement for luncheon, and the vesperal attendance to some unmental form of recreation,—with one small interest displacing another in endless succession, until bedtime arrives and the undertaker tucks them in.

Those fourteen years explain to me the Hergesheimer women, too, those somewhat troublingly

ornamental odalisques. They are fine costly toys, tricked out in curious tissues: and, waiting for the strong male's leisure, they smile cryptically. They will divert him by and by, when the day's work is despatched, maintaining their own thoughts inviolate, even in that treacherous instant of comminglement wherein the strongest of men must abate reserve. But their moment is not daylit, for the Hergesheimer women are all-incongruous with what is done during office-hours, nor are they to be valued then. Sometimes they are embodied ideals, to be sure, remotely prized as symbols or else grasped as trophies to commemorate the nearing of the goal: but for the most part they rank candidly as avocational interests. I find nowhere in Joseph Hergesheimer's stories any record of intimacy and confidence between a man and a woman. . . . And this too, I think, reflects that all-important formative fourteen years wherein, whatever may have been Mr. Hergesheimer's conduct of his relatively unimportant physical life, his fundamental concernments were pursued in a realm, of necessity, uninhabited by women.

Indeed, no woman can with real content permit the man whom she proprietorially cherishes, to traffic in this queer lonely realm, and she cannot but, secretly, regard his visits thereto as a personal slight. So the creative artist remains (when luckiest) at silent feud with his current wife, because both are

perpetually irritated by the failure of their joint effort to ignore the fact that she ranks as an avocational interest. And the creative artist remains, at bottom, an anchorite whose actual living is given over to his diversions in a withdrawn and not overwholesome country whereinto no other person can ever enter; and whence he, tired out for the while by his playing, deviates now and then into four-square existence—should it be only, we will say, to come down to his supper,—as a talking and laughing and amorous and blatant animal, very much as other wearied persons wander off into their dreams.

## § 63

What, though, the dull may wonder, was the precise goal of the fourteen years of visually unproductive "writing"? Since those first stories have not ever been printed, one may here seem to advance on a bridge of guesswork. Yet really, to the considerate, the answer is plain. In all that is to-day accessible of Mr. Hergesheimer's earlier creative feats—with one exception duly noted hereinafter,—you observe perforce an overt negligence, and indeed an ostentatious avoidance, of any aiming toward popularity. That during the fourteen years young Hergesheimer labored toward the applause and cheques of a "best-seller" becomes to the con-

siderate inconceivable. Nor could that well, indeed, have been a motive strong enough to sustain him thus long, since the maker of reading-matter, like any other tradesman, has need of quick returns where the artist battens on immediate rejections.

No: Mr. Hergesheimer's monomania, one perceives, was then to write for his own diversion. He was then playing all the while at the game the artist must always play: and doubtless he also, like the most of his confrères in diversion, devised extremely imposing titles for his self-indulgence. But the point is that here, for fourteen years, the one possible incentive for the boy to go on writing was that he enjoyed doing it. The point is that Joseph Hergesheimer, whatever his voiced pretexts or his actual intentions, gave over these fourteen years to an attestation of the fact that the main and the all-absorbing purpose of literary art is to divert the literary artist.

Some by-products in the way of minor gains, he, questionless, might look for as he went about his playing with words, and gave all to the game which he played in large part because he could not help it, and in part with the hope of, somehow and some day, obtaining an audience with the same or a kindred sense of beauty. . . . This hope, to be sure, seems always a vain aspiration: and that which we loosely talk about as "beauty" perhaps does not

exist as a vital thing save here and there in the thoughts of not too many and not to be too seriously taken persons. In life, rather frequently, one appears to catch a glimpse of something of the sort just around the corner or over the way; but it is rarely, and perhaps never, actually at hand. Sometimes, of course, one seems about to incorporate the elusive thing into one's daily living; and, striving, finds the attempt a grasping at an opalescent bubble, with the same small shock, the same disrupting disillusionment. And "beauty," thus, is by the judicious conceded to be an unembodiable thought, never quite to be grasped by the mind; and certainly not ever nicely nor with any self-content to be communicated via the pages of a book, wherein are preserved, at best, the faded petals and the flattened crumbling stalks of what seemed lovely once to somebody who is as dead as are these desiccated relics of his ardor and of his disputable taste.

In brief, it may be granted—and by Mr. Hergesheimer most cheerfully of all persons,—that during these fourteen years young Joseph Hergesheimer diverted himself by attempting the self-evidently impossible.

## § 64

Now, to my thinking, there is something curiously similar to that unreasonable endeavor to be found in

all the Hergesheimer novels. Here always I find portrayed, with an insistency and a reiteration to which I seem to detect a queer analogue in the writings of Christopher Marlowe, men laboring toward the unattainable, and a high questing foiled. No one of the Hergesheimer novels has varied from this formula, from the first published of them to the current *Balisand*. . . .

Anthony Ball, of *The Lay Anthony,* strives toward the beauty of chastity,—not morally concerned one way or the other, but bent to preserve his physical purity for the sake of a girl whose body, he finds at last, has long ago been ravished by worms. Again, in *Mountain Blood* is no hint of moral-mongering,—for Mr. Hergesheimer is no more concerned with moral values than is the Decalogue,—when Gordon Makimmon toils toward the beauty of atonement, to die in all a broken man, with his high goal yet gleaming on the horizon untouched. The three black Pennys flounder toward the beauty of a defiant carnal passion, which through the generations scorches and defiles, and burns out futilely by and by, leaving only slag where the aspiring lovely fire was. And through the formal garden ways of *Java Head* pass feverishly at least five persons who struggle (and fretfully know their failure to be foredoomed) toward the capturing of one or another evincement of beauty, with the resultant bodily de-

molishment of three of them and the spiritual maiming of the others.

That which one, for whatever reason, finds most beautiful must become one's diversion from all other interests; it is a goal which one seeks futilely, and with discomfort and peril, but which one seeks inevitably: such is the "plot" of these four novels. Such is also, as I need hardly say, the "plot" of the aforementioned fourteen years wherein not anything tangible was achieved except the consuming of youth and postage. . . .

Nor does the dénouement differ, either, in any of these novels: the postman comes with the plethoric envelope which signals from afar that the result of much high-hearted striving is not quite suited to the present needs of this world's editor; and sometimes the postman is Age, but more often he is Death.

## § 65

Now the fifth of the Hergesheimer novels is *Linda Condon,* which renders self-confessedly a story of "the old service of beauty, of the old gesture toward the stars,"—"here never to be won, never to be realized,"—of the service which "only beauty knows and possesses". . . . For *Linda Condon* is to be valued less as the life-history of a woman than as the de-

piction—curt, incisive and yet pitying,—of a shrine that, however transiently, was hallowed.

At the exacting workaday pursuit of being a human being this Linda fails, fails chilled and wistful. She has, like more of us than dare proclaim the defect, no talent whatever for heart-felt living: so that most persons seem but to pass grayly upon the horizon of her consciousness, like unintelligible wraiths gesticulating,—and always remaining somehow disjunct and not gravely important,—the while that all the needs and obligations of one's corporal life must be discharged with an ever-present sense of their queer triviality. Toward nobody, neither toward Linda Condon's mother nor lover, nor husband nor children, may she, the real Linda, quite entertain any sense of actual attachment, far less of intimacy. . . .

Meanwhile she has her loveliness, not of character or mind, but a loan of surpassing physical beauty. And to Linda Condon her own bright moving carcass becomes a thing to be tended and preserved religiously, because beauty is divine, and she herself is estimable, if at all, as the fane which beauty briefly inhabits. . . . And by and by, under time's handling, her comeliness is shriveled, and her lovers are turned to valueless dust: but first, has Linda's lost young beauty been the buried sculptor's inspiration, and this has been perpetuated, in everlasting bronze.

The perfection of Linda Condon's youth is never to perish, and is not ever to be dulled by old age or corrupted in death. She comprehends this as she passes out of the story, a faded, desolate and insignificant bit of rubbish, contented to know that the one thing which really meant much to her is, as if by a miracle, preserved inviolate. The statue remains, the immutable child of Linda's comeliness and Pleydon's genius, the deathless offspring of transitory things.

Beauty is divine; a power superior and somewhat elfinly inimical to all human moralities and rules of thumb, and a divinity which must unflinchingly be served: that, in this book is Mr. Hergesheimer's text. For this is the divinity which he, too, has served, time and again, with strangely patterned evocations, in striving to write perfectly of beautiful happenings.

It is an ideal here approached more nearly and more nobly than in the preceding Hergesheimer books. Nowhere, indeed, to my thinking, has Joseph Hergesheimer found an arena nicelier suited to the exercise of his most exquisite powers than in this modern tale of domnei,—of the worship of woman's beauty as, upon the whole, Heaven's finest sample of artistic self-expression, and as, in consequence, the most adequate revelation of God; and, as such a symbol, therefore, the one thing to be revered above all else that visibly exists, even by its temporary possessor. That last is Mr. Hergesheimer's especial re-

finement upon a tenet sufficiently venerable to have been nodded over by Troy's gray-bearded councillors when that phantom woman whom they believed to be Queen Helen passed,—and a refinement, too, which would have been repudiated by Helen herself, who, if one may trust to Euripides' report of her sentiments, was inclined to regard more prosaically her own personal appearance, as a disaster-provoking nuisance.

Well, and to Linda, also, was beauty a nuisance,—"a bitter and luxurious god," that implacably required to be honored with sacrifices of common joys and ties and ruddy interests, but was none the less divine. Sustained by this one faith, Linda Hallet goes out of the story, when youth is over, and when she too must pass,—and goes regarding not very seriously that which is human and ephemeral, even as embodied in her lovers and her children, nor in herself, but, rather, always turning grave blue eyes toward that which is—perhaps—divine. She passes, as at once the abandoned sanctuary, the priestess, the postulant, and the martyr, of that beauty to which fools had referred as "hers." She passes not as the wreckage of a toy, but as an outworn instrument which has helped to further—it may be—the labor of a god. For she passes, as all must pass, without any assurance of achievement; but with content. That, really, is the happy end. . . .

## § 66

—Which reminds me that for the most part I am rattling very old bones. Those seemingly unfruitful fourteen years are to-day at one with those other fourteen years which brought an elder Joseph into Egyptian publicity. Neglected merit has here been rewarded with that sort of loud and full-blown triumphing which in fairy-stories moves us to delighted applause, and in real life to instant, envious, sharp disparagement. For Mr. Hergesheimer has long ago "arrived": his books have found their proper and appreciative audience; whereas his short stories are purchased, and probably read, along with the encomiums of ready-made clothing and safety razors, by the I forget how many million buyers of the world's most popular magazine. . . .

Now, here, when I first wrote about Mr. Hergesheimer, here I seemed to find stark provocations of uneasiness. I spoke with diffidence, and was not entirely swayed, I believe, by the natural inclination of every writer to backbite his fellow craftsman. In any event, dismissing *Gold and Iron* (after some reflection) with unqualified applause, I took up *The Happy End:* and of the seven stories contained therein six seemed to me to display a cornerstone of eminently "popular" psychology, ranging from the as yet sacrosanct belief that all Germans are perfectly

horrid people, to the axiom that the youngest, unrespected brother is invariably the one to exterminate the family enemies; and duly including the sentiment that noble hearts very often beat under ragged shirts. And I was made uneasy by the spectacle of these uplifting faiths—these literary baking powders more properly adapted to the Horrible Trites and the Gluepot Stews among reading-matter confectioners, —thus utilized by a Joseph Hergesheimer.

I was made uneasy because I reasoned in this way: when Mr. Hergesheimer is writing a short story to be printed next to advertising matter in some justly popular periodical, Mr. Hergesheimer, being rational and human, cannot but think of the subscribers to that popular periodical. I forget, I repeat, how many millions of them have been duly attested upon affidavit to exist, but certainly not many thousands of our fellow citizens can regard Mr. Hergesheimer at his best and purest with anything save bewildered abhorrence. So he must compromise,—subconsciously, I believe,—and must adapt his methods to the idiosyncrasies and the limitations of his audience, very much as he probably refrains from addressing his chauffeur in the heightened and consummated English of *San Cristóbal de la Habana.*

The danger, I reflected, was not that Joseph Hergesheimer would lower his ideals, nor in anything alter what he wished to communicate; but was

the fact that he must attempt to transmit these things into the vernacular and into the orbits of thought of his enormous audience, with the immaculate motive of making his ideas comprehensible. He could not, being rational and human, but by and by be tempted yet further to endeavor—as he had flagrantly endeavored in the tale called "Tol'able David,"—to convey his wayside apprehensions of life via some such always acceptable vehicle as the prehistoric fairy-tale cliché of the scorned and ultimately victorious third champion. This was with a vengeance the pouring of new wine into a usage-battered and always brazen cup which spoiled the brew. . . .

Six of these stories, then, were beautifully written moral tales: although, to be sure, there was an alleviating seventh, in "The Flower of Spain," which was a well-nigh perfect and a profoundly immoral work of art. I therefore put aside this volume with discomfort. . . .

But I suspect that here the axiomatic mutual jealousy of all authors should be discounted. As an "outsider" in letters, I could not, at the time to which I refer, be expected to view with equanimity the then recent installation of Mr. Hergesheimer in the American National Institute of Arts and Letters, wherein the other representatives of creative literature were such approved masters as Mr. Nelson

Lloyd, Mr. Will Payne, Mr. Robert W. Chambers and Professor Hermann Hagedorn. At this port, once so neatly charted as "the Ellis Island of the Academy," had the skipper of *The Happy End* arrived. The fact had been formally recognized by our best-thought-of cultural element, that in artistic achievement Joseph Hergesheimer had but fifty living superiors, and only a hundred and ninety-nine equals, at that moment resident in the United States: and I, who had not been tendered any such accolade, could not but be aware of human twinges when Mr. Hergesheimer as a matter of course accepted this distinction.

So it was, no doubt, the impurest sort of envy and low-mindedness which caused me here to suspect alarming symptoms. I, in any event, put aside *The Happy End* with profound discomfort; and turned to the reflection that Mr. Hergesheimer had since written *Linda Condon,* which discomforted me quite as poignantly by exposing to me my poverty in phrases sufficiently noble to apply to this wholly admirable book.

## § 67

Yet Mr. Hergesheimer, even in the least worthy of his magazine stories, writes really well. The phrase has an inadequate ring: but of how many novelists can this be pardonably said by anybody save their

publishers? The majority of us, whatever and however weighty may be our other merits, can manage, in this matter of sheer writing, to select and arrange our adjectives and verbs and other literary ingredients acceptably enough, every now and then: and that is the utmost which honesty can assert.

But Mr. Hergesheimer almost always writes really well, once you have licensed his idiosyncrasy of depending upon interjected proper names to explain to whom his, Hergesheimer's, pronouns refer; or of, as if with a feigned yawn, inserting the synonym, the qualification, which explains, suggests, that the word, the phrase, used, printed, isn't, after all, entirely, quite the affair he'd wanted. . . . Perhaps I here drift too remotely into technicalities, and tend to substitute for a consideration of architecture a treatise upon brick-making. In any event, I shall not here join in the chorus of the innumerable hundreds of critics who have pointed out how intensely Mr. Hergesheimer realizes the sensuous world of his characters and, in particular, the optic world. Yet I grant, he is the most insistently superficial of all writers known to me, in his emphasis upon shapes and textures and pigments. His people are rendered from complexion to coat-tail buttons, and the reader is given precisely the creasing of each forehead and the pleating of their under-linen. "The Works of Joseph Hergesheimer" contain whole warehousefuls

of the most carefully finished furniture in print; and at bric-à-brac he has no English equal. It is all visioned, moreover, very minutely. Here is a guide who exhibits not merely the halls and presence-chambers of the building wherethrough he shepherds the public, but forces you to observe the chairs and panellings and wall-papers and window-curtains also, with an abnormal scrutiny. The scenery and the weather, to be sure, are "done" just as painstakingly; but these are indigenous impedimenta to most stories.

Now of course, like virtually every other practise of "realism," this is untrue to life: nobody does in living regard adjacent objects as attentively as the reader of a Hergesheimer story is compelled to note them. For one, I cannot quite ignore this fact, even when I read with most complaisance. I have, though, my own faith as to the value of all descriptory passages: and, it may be, I shall presently speak of this. . . . Meanwhile I sometimes wonder if Mr. Hergesheimer premeditatedly sits down to inventory for scriptorial use the precise aspect of a chair or an andiron, of a fan or a shelf of East India money or a fallen magnolia petal; or whether his personal existence is actually given over to this concentration upon externals and inanimate things. But he was once a painter; and large residuals of the put-by art survive.

All this results in a "style" to which the reader is never quite oblivious. The Hergesheimer dramas—dramas wherein each of the players has a slight touch of fever,—are enacted, with a refining hint of remoteness, behind the pellucid crystal of this "style," which sharpens outlines, and makes colors more telling than they appear to everyday observation, and brings out unsuspected details (seen now for the first time by the reader, with a pleasurable shock of delight), and just noticeably glazes all.

The Hergesheimerian panorama is, thus, if I may plagiarize a little, rather truer than truth: and to turn from actual life to Joseph Hergesheimer's pages arouses a sensation somewhat akin to that sustained by a myopic person when he puts on spectacles. . . . And thus, too, is an inoffensive tropic town foredoomed to be a perennial source of disappointment to all tourists who have previously read *San Cristóbal de la Habana,*—that multi-colored sorcerous volume, with which I have here no instant concern,—and who, being magic-haunted, will over-rashly bring to rest upon a duly incorporated city, thriftily engaged in the tobacco and liquor-business, their eyes unre-enforced.

## § 68

Such, then, were, and are yet, this artist's materials: in a world of extraordinary vividness a

drama of high questing foiled, a tragedy of beauty sought, with many blunders but single-mindedly, by monomaniacs,—in fine, a performance suggestively allied, in its essentials, to the smaller-scaled and unaudienced drama of the young man with the percipient eyes of a painter, who throughout fourteen years was striving to visualize in words his vision of beauty; and who was striving to communicate that vision; and who—the tastes of the average man being that queer slovenly aggregation which makes the popular periodical popular, and the ostensible leaders of men being regular subscribers to the slatternly driveling host,—was striving in vain.

These things are but the raw materials, I repeat, —the bricks and mortar and the scantlings,—for, of course, there is in Joseph Hergesheimer's books far more than plot or thought, or even "style": there very often is that indescribable element which is magic.

When Linda Condon came to look closely at Pleydon's statue, you may remember, she noted in chief the statue's haunting eyes, and marveled to find them "nothing but shadows over two depressions." Much the equivalent of that is the utmost to which one can lay a crude finger in appraising the best of Mr. Hergesheimer's books. They are like other books in that they contain nothing more prodigious than words from the nearest dictionary put together upon

ordinary paper. . . . But the eyes of Pleydon's statue—you may remember, too,—for all that they were only indentations in wet clay, "gazed fixed and aspiring into a hidden dream perfectly created by his desire." And viewing the statue, you were conscious of that dream, not of wet clay: and you were moved by the dream's loveliness as it was communicated, incommunicably, by Pleydon's art.

Now, at its purest, the art of the real Hergesheimer, the fundamental and essential thing about Joseph Hergesheimer, is just that intangible magic which he ascribes to his fictitious Pleydon. And the dream that Joseph Hergesheimer, too, has perfectly created by his desire, and has so often sought to communicate, I take to be "the old gesture toward the stars . . . a faith spiritual, because, here, it is never to be won, never to be realized."

This is, I think, the "gesture" of the materially unproductive fourteen years: and its logic, either then or now, is indefensible. Still, one agrees with Cyrano, *Mais quel geste!* and one is conscious of "a warm indiscriminate thrill about the heart" and of a treacherous sympathy, which evades reason. . . .

## § 69

It was through distrust of this beguiling sympathy that, when I first wrote elsewhere about Mr.

Hergesheimer, I spoke throughout with self-restraint, and hedged with "I think" and "I believe" and "It seems to me," and niggled over Hergesheimerian faults that were certainly tiny and possibly non-existent; because of my private suspicion that all my private notions about Joseph Hergesheimer were probably incorrect. To me, I confess, he did at that time appear a phenomenon a little too soul-satisfying to be entirely credible.

Pure reason did not brevet it as plausible that the Hergesheimer I privately found in the pages of the Hergesheimer books could flourish in any land wherein the creative writer is as a rule condemned to choose between becoming the butt or the buttress of mediocrity; so that I must cautiously refrain from quite believing in this Joseph Hergesheimer as a physical manifestation in actual trousers and waistcoat. . . . Indeed, his corporeal existence could not well be conceded except upon the hypothesis that America had produced, and was even nourishing, a literary artist who might endure in the first rank. Which was absurd, of course, and a contention not to be supported this side of Bedlam, and, none the less, was my firm private belief.

None the less, also, did it then seem to me the part of wisdom to speak with very self-conscious self-restraint, because for the judicious any more thorough-going dicta were checked by the probability,

and the ardent hope, that Mr. Hergesheimer's playing with words and ideas had hardly begun. Nobody would be so rash as to predict the upshot of any author's career with no ampler data to educe from than the initial chapters, however fine. Rather, must it perforce content me to believe that the Joseph Hergesheimer who had made head against the fourteen years of neglect and apparent failure, without ever arranging any very serious compromise with human dunderheadedness and self-complacency, was now in train to weather unarithmeticable decades of public success by virtue of the same wholesome egoism. And I could see besetting him, I said, just one lean danger,—a feline peril which hunts subtly, with sheathed claws and amicable purrings,—in the circumstance that the well-meaning Philistia which yesterday had been Mr. Hergesheimer's adversary, so far as it had noted him at all, would be henceforward affording him quite sensible and friendly and sincere advice.

Well! the results should, at the worst,—I said also,—be interesting. . . .

## § 70

And the results have, indeed, been interesting. The drawback to my appraising these results is the fact that I have since come to know the author with

a familiarity which clouds my vision of his art. I can invest in my judgment of Joseph Hergesheimer's later books no heartier faith than I would hazard on my opinion of my own writings.

No: I for various reasons cannot judge *Steel,* nor *The Bright Shawl,* nor *Balisand;* about my extreme fondness for *The Presbyterian Child* here is no need to speak; and as to *Cytherea* I shall likewise say not anything. For the man talks to me—talks all abeam and generally reminiscent of a time-battered cherub who fell long ago with Lucifer, but only as far as Pennsylvania,—about the book he is going to write. I, meekly attendant, warm alike to his notion and to his cordial delight in himself. And by and by he publishes a volume which, to cold reason, would seem, I daresay, very faintly suggestive of the book he talked about. But I do not ever read the published volume in the light of cold reason. Instead, I read with comprehension. Not only do I understand and by ordinary applaud the changes from his original conception, the changes based upon logic and expediency and upon Mr. Hergesheimer's virtually inerrant technical skill: I also read into the actual book those fine first ideas which, for one cause or another, proved impracticable, and were omitted wholly. I read the book, in brief, with a comprehending sympathy that befogs judgment, and with such passionate unwillingness to find fault any-

here as makes for no very valuable critical appraisements. I know it is all most gratifyingly good. But just how good, I have no notion. . . . Nor here is an artist whom I can no longer criticize with any feeling of security; and so about his later books which, indeed, do not bear weightily upon the point would now emphasize) I shall here say nothing. Yet I must in this place confess that I read sundry criticisms of his playing—which you may, if you like, call "work,"—with a half-fretted sense of wonder. Joseph Hergesheimer is, to my mind, a fact, largish, a significant, and an enduring fact. The regret of brilliant and earnest-minded reviewers that Joseph Hergesheimer is not in one or another feature different, seems a small and ephemeral fact: and I candidly wonder why the critic thinks the regret worth stating. It really does, when appraised from any utilitarian standpoint, suggest the squandered insolence of the gentleman who spoke disrespectfully of the equator. I do not contemplate with seriousness the notion that some reviewer here or there may imagine that his disapproval will cause Joseph Hergesheimer, or, for that matter, any other self-centered creating romanticist, to follow in his next book the critic's advice, because such a delusion cannot be harbored, I hope, by anybody. For the artist plays the especial game he chooses: the diversion he gets out of such playing is for him the one veritably im-

portant thing in life: and when you tell him you do not approve of all the by-products of his diversion, he very frequently does not damn your impudence quite audibly; but he invariably wonders why you should be telling, of all persons, him about your disapproval, rather as if you expected him to do something about it.

§ 71

So,—to go back,—I can criticize none of these later books with any feeling of security. But of one thing I am wholly certain. It is to the Hergesheimer I never knew that I now have large cause to be grateful,—to the younger Hergesheimer of those seemingly wasted fourteen years, which, far from being wasted, were given over to establishing the fact that at least one other novelist then wrote primarily to divert himself; and that, for at least one other person, the craft of the creating romanticist stayed all this while a game at which the artist played, regardful always of his high and joyous gaming and of nothing else.

Nor, very naturally, does he play with those ideas—any more than does M. Anatole France,—in which he crudely "believes." I glance back, for example, over the novels of which I have just spoken. Well! the author of *Mountain Blood* and *The Lay Anthony* is, I consider, as rational as most of us

about atoning for his misdeeds or about preserving one's physical chastity: I would trust him as utterly as I would myself never in private life to evince upon either topic any embarrassing fanaticism. And it is equally gratifying to record that the man who wrote *The Three Black Pennys* and *Linda Condon* is neither the dazed slave of carnal passion nor of any continual high evaluation of his own physical loveliness. The "ideas" of these novels, in fine, are not his idols but his playthings; and are the diverting toys with which the anchorite has entertained his stay in that withdrawn queer lonely country to which also I recently referred.

And such, I repeat, is the ultimate and lean, but real, value of all human ideas. So I applaud the wisdom of Joseph Hergesheimer. I applaud too, because of the joy I have got out of it, his talent. Yet I in part applaud because of my pleased consciousness that this fine talent seems, like all considerable creative talent, a form of self-indulgence which has become beneficent to other persons almost by chance. For I think that through the haze of those "wasted" fourteen years one glimpses, clearly enough, the artist who labors primarily to divert himself.

# VIII

# THE DELTA OF RADEGONDE

"The same mode of teaching was not adopted by all, nor, indeed, did individuals always confine themselves to the same system, but each varied his plan of instruction according to circumstances. For they were accustomed, in stating their argument with the utmost clearness, to use figures and apologies, and to put cases as circumstances required; and these might be either cases which came under trial in the courts or fictitious cases."

## 8.

## *The Delta of Radegonde*

§ 72

THE literary artist plays, I had said, at the game of lending to his personal notions a life which will survive the life of his body. But, as I prepared to go on to that, I was stayed by an uneasy doubt lest here was needed some further explanation as to why I should label the younger Joseph Hergesheimer, and for that matter every other valid artist, an anchorite. The especial word, I reflected, might still be considered inappropriate by persons who in their muddled minds had somehow associated anchorites with extreme religious zeal and with physical asceticism and pietistic self-denials.

Yet an anchorite was, of course, a person who lived in actual rather than specious retirement: among the great anchorites of all time, whose real living was "in the little farm of one's own mind, where a silence so profound may be enjoyed," had been that Marcus Aurelius who walked and spoke in

unflagging imperial publicity and slept with Faustina. . . . But, I knew, here again was a matter most nearly explicable by a parable: and my thoughts turned to another old tale out of Poictesme, the story of that gallant Holden who was for all the bustle of his daily living an anchorite and also, in his way, I suspect, an artist.

## § 73

It was, the tale declares, just after the followers of the Silver Stallion had sacked Lacre Kai that young Holden found, among his plunder, the triangular portrait of Elphànor's queen: and for the time young Holden thought little about the picture. He could not foreknow that its old frame, in shape like the Greek letter Delta, was to bind all his living. But after a few months of peace the lad went to Guivric, afterward called the Sage, who was already coming into esteem as a most promising thaumaturgist.

"Guivric," says Holden, "the lady in this three-cornered picture is the lady of my love; and you must tell me how I may win her affections."

Guivric looked at the portrait for some while, scratched off a fleck of paint from it with his finger-nail, and answered:

"There are impediments to your winning this Queen Radegonde. For one thing, she has been dead for thirteen centuries."

"I admit that thirteen is proverbially an unlucky number; but my all-consuming love is not to be intimidated by superstitions."

Guivric thereupon consulted the oldest and most authentic poems, and Guivric admitted:

"Well, perhaps her being dead such an unlucky number of centuries does not matter, after all, because my authorities appear agreed that love defies time and death. Yet it does matter, I suspect, that the woman in this picture was the notion which a dead artist perpetuated of the Queen Radegonde whom he saw in the flesh."

"So would I see her, Guivric."

"Holden, my meaning is more respectable than your meaning. I mean that, if the man labored as a tradesman executing an order, your cause may prosper: but there is the ugly chance that this radiant, slim, gray-eyed girl was born of the man's brain, very much as, even more anciently, they say, King Jove brought forth a gray-eyed daughter to devastate the world with wisdom: and in that case, I fear the worst."

"What, then, is the worst that can happen?"

"Thinking about it too much beforehand," replied Guivric, drily.

Whereupon the young mage gave directions which must be followed to the letter if one wished to avoid an indescribable fate. But Holden was cautious,

and did follow these instructions to the letter; and when it proved to be the Greek letter Delta he entered it, and so came to his desire, and communicated his love to Queen Radegonde.

Now this Radegonde had been alone ever since she was first painted, because in filling in the background, and in completing her portrait, the painter had provided her with no company in the quaint triangular tropic garden he had painted to enhance her charms. So to have Holden thus thrusting himself into the vacancy was welcome to Radegonde. And to him her loveliness, and the dearness of her, was greater than he could quite believe in after he had left the Delta, and had returned, in the gray and abject way which Guivric had foretold, to the world of men.

§ 74

Holden thereafter kept the picture in a secret place, and the years wore on: and in the spring of one of these years Sir Holden rescued a bright-haired princess, from an enchanter in a large and appalling line of business near Perdigon: and Holden married her, and they got on together very nicely. But times had changed in Poictesme, for Manuel the Redeemer had ridden away to a far place beyond the sunset, and his wife Dame Niafer ruled over-strictly in the tall hero's stead: and to Holden

life seemed not the affair it once had been, and all his pleasuring was to go into the Delta that belonged to tender and warm-blooded Radegonde. The delights of that small tropic garden were joys unknown in the world of men, wherein there are no such women as Elphànor's queen: and therefore the poets have not invented any words to describe these delights, and they must stay untold.

But these delights contented Holden. "Blessed above all men that live am I, in that I am lord of the Delta of Radegonde," said Holden, who could not foreknow his fate.

## § 75

And it was to Holden an unfailing cordial, thus to steal away from his prosaic workaday life of fighting dragons and ogres, and discomfiting wicked monarchs by guessing their riddles out of hand, and riding about in every kind of weather redressing the afflictions of downtrodden strangers in whom he was not interested; and from the strain of pretending to be wise and admirable in all things for the benefit of his numerous children; and from living among many servitors somewhat lonelily. For comeliness and mirth had soon departed from his bright-haired princess wife, through much childbearing, and presently life too had gone out of her;

and her various informal successors proved to be rather stupid once you got to know them. But tender and warm-blooded Radegonde, whom alone Sir Holden loved, and the engaging ever-new endearments of Elphànor's queen, were to the knight an unfailing cordial.

"Blessed above all men that live am I, in that I am lord of the Delta of Radegonde," still said, in his gray beard, Sir Holden, who could not foreknow his fate.

## § 76

But as the years went, so went youth; and the appearance and the abilities of Holden were altering, and bashfully Radegonde asked questions about certain noticeable changes. The aging champion explained, as well as he could, the ways of nibbling age and of devouring death, to Elphànor's ageless queen, who knew nothing of these matters, because her painter had willed to put other affairs in the triangular garden. And it troubled Radegonde that Holden must be stripped by such marauders of all vigor. Her love for her sole lover, and her horror of being left alone where no other man was ever apt to come thrusting himself into the vacancy, were so great that, with a shedding of resistless tears, the gray-eyed girl persuaded Holden to consult once more with Guivric the Sage; and to discover through

the aid of his magic if there were no wizardry by which Radegonde could be made mortal.

"For then," said she, "we shall abate in vigor together, my dearest, and die together; and not even after death need we dread separation, when I lie buried at your side where men will have engraved upon your tomb *Resurgam.*"

And wise Guivric said that certainly there was a way in which Radegonde might come out of the picture, and assume mortality. But Guivric, shaking his white head, advised against it.

And Guivric said:

"It would be better, old friend, to accept the common lot of men; and to be content to see your dreams played with a while and then put by, rather than see them realized. Besides, you have many grandchildren, and you owe them an example."

But Holden answered, "Bosh! Do I owe nothing to myself?"

So the high-hearted lovers followed the way of which Guivric had told them. This way is not to be talked about; but blood was shed in the Delta, and the worm that dies not was imprisoned: and after other appalling happenings, Holden the Brave climbed out rheumatically from the canvas, and gave his hand to Queen Radegonde; and she also stepped from the triangular frame, and entered into life as

the mortal woman that Radegonde had been in the old time.

## § 77

Straightway she recollected her husband and her children and many of her lovers, and the gilded domes of Elphànor's seven proud cities, where now not even a hut was, and all the perfumed wasteful living which Radegonde had known in the old time; and straightway, too, she saw that Holden was a tedious decrepit fellow, well past the love of women. And Holden saw that his Radegonde was a flighty and a rather silly barbarian wench, sufficiently good-looking to be sure, but in no way remarkable. And the two gazed at each other rather forlornly.

The queen began to shiver and to whimper. "I never," she said, "I never for one moment was so lonely in my Delta as I am now."

Avuncularly he patted her white shoulder. "Do not give way, my dear. We have acted unwisely, and nobody denies it: but do you come out of this draught, and I will get you some clothes and have you baptised; and then I will present you to our young Count Emmerick, and you can entertain yourself, within Christian limits, by making a fool of him."

"A vigorous and handsome count would be better than nothing," the fair girl conceded.

So this presentation was arranged. And tall Emmerick was infatuated the moment he saw the queen's beguiling innocent young face. Forthwith the high Count of Poictesme proclaimed a banquet: and when all were dancing, Holden returned to the void frame; and he considered that lost tropic garden, bereft now forever of the radiant and gray-eyed slip of womanhood whom he had loved, and who would content his life no more.

Guivric came with him: and these two old men kept silence.

§ 78

"We may deduce that the painter loved her thirteen centuries ago," says Guivric,—"erecting loveliness where there was little to build upon. Thus it is that the brain of man creates women more desirable than may be created by other means: and such women endure. But the women children that have two parents, may endure only a very little longer than may the scant delights a man can get in gardens that bear bitter fruit or else insipid fruit: for these women have no such Delta as had your lost Radegonde, no more than has that dispossessed lean ogling flirt of whom young Emmerick will presently be tiring."

Moreover Guivric said:

"The women who are born of man's brain have no

flaw in them and no seed of death. There was a Radegonde conceived in Camwy, that walked the glittering pavements of Lacre Kai, and wedded Elphànor, King of Kings, and trysted with many lovers, and later trysted with small worms: but in the artist's brain was conceived another Radegonde, a maid who walks the sun-paths of eternity, and who is new-born with every April. Thus it was of old: and this tale is not ended."

And Guivric said also:

"The women who are born of man's brain bear to their lovers no issue save dissatisfaction. Their ways are lovely, but contentment does not abide in these ways: and he that follows after the women who are born of man's brain is wounded subtilely with wounds which may not ever be quite healed. So let no woman with two parents cosset him: for she toils vainly and in large peril; because it is upon her that he will requite his subtile wounding, just as you, poor Holden, were the destruction of that golden-haired young wife who loved you, and whom you could not love."

## § 79

Thus said Guivric the Sage; and Holden, a spent man, much hurt but very proud, who now foreknew his fate, replied with resolute smiling:

"Blessed above all men that live am I, in that in

the days of my folly I have been lord of the Delta of Radegonde. I know this, Guivric, as you may not ever know it,—not you, who are as old as I, and who have only wisdom to look back upon."

Guivric the Sage answered very soberly:

"That is true. For, to have been wise throughout one's youth becomes by and by a taunt; and to remember it is a disease."

And Holden the Brave said now, with another sort of smiling:

"There is in attendance upon everybody a physician that heals all disease. Pending his coming, old friend, I mean to beat you at one more game of chess."

Whereon these aged men fell to such staid diversion as was suited to their remainder of life. But slim gray-eyed Radegonde danced merrily with her new lover.

# IX

# A THEME WITH VARIATIONS

"I expose myself entire: 'tis a body where, at one view, the veins, muscles and tendons are apparent, every of them in its proper place; here the effect of a cold; there of the heart beating, very dubiously. I do not write my own acts, but myself and my essence. . . . Because Socrates had alone digested to purpose the precept of his god, 'to know himself,' and by that study had arrived at the perfection of setting himself at nought, he only was reputed worthy the title of a sage."

## 9.

## *A Theme With Variations*

§ 80

THE literary artist plays, I had said, at the game of perpetuating, not merely (as did the painter of Queen Radegonde) his personal notions, but also his own personality. . . .

To me that seemed a secondary consideration. Yet that was, I took it, the main tenet of the Economists and of the creed which John Charteris had elsewhere expounded. Kings and prime ministers and admirals and czars and popes and bank-presidents all shrivelled with the passing of time, as I had said earlier, into some uncarnate quality, uncertainly remembered. But writers here and there did attain to a sort of terrestrial immortality as rounded, actual human beings. The lyric poet bequeaths to us like a legacy his personal emotion, the familiar essayist makes the gossamer of his whims and fancies perdurable as diamonds. The great egotists, in particular, such as Pepys, Casanova, Montaigne, Cellini,

Rousseau, are generally conceded each to have immortalized himself and all his traits, especially his frailties: for each lounges into our libraries unreticently, proclaiming, in the words of Montaigne, "I expose myself entire"; and each too has, by lending to every peccadillo permanency, kept letters healthily lewd, with the lustiness of eternal youth. . . .

Well! that, with just one reservation, which I thought not unimportant, seemed true enough. For the great egotists do achieve very charming and tolerably permanent results, in a fashion that I could best appraise, I believed, by pausing here to consider the triumphant outcome, in our own era, of the literary endeavors of Mr. George Moore.

§ 81

No reasonably conceited author, I said,—if for the moment one might imagine any of the tribe to merit the adverb,—would aspire to be perpetuated in a form more worthy than, in the Carra Edition, had lately been bestowed upon the Collected Works of George Moore. It was true that I spoke with, of the promised twenty volumes, only fourteen at hand: but these I had found in every nicety of book-making to be wholly admirable. Paper and binding and printing were of the sort describable as luxurious.

The frontispieces most handsomely presented George Moore in every imaginable phase of moustache and mental abstraction. In fine, it was the sort of Collected Edition which any victim of the ennervating habit of writing books could not but view a little wistfully. And, though for a while I had thought to lay finger upon one marked, consolatory defect,—that the lack of running-heads to the pages creates some difficulty in locating at once the especial subdivision of the volume for which you happen to be looking,—yet reflection had made against such petty fault-finding, by revealing that, after all, it was as remunerative to read in one place as another, in this longish book which is devoted, after all, entirely to one topic.

For Mr. Moore, of course, had nowhere written except incidentally about anything except George Moore. To some this might appear a dubious axiom, in view of the circumstance that of these fourteen volumes no less than eight consisted of the earlier Realistic Novels,—as we used to hear them called, only yesterday, with a certain lowering of the voice,—wherein there is no explicit word as to George Moore. Yet, when seen in the entirety of the Carra Edition, I thought,—as I still think,—and when appraised as component parts of the one longish book which every sincere literary artist perforce composes, and of which his various publications are

each a chapter, then these novels fall into their proper niche. George Moore in youth was exposed to, among other perils, the corrupting influence of "realism"; and here are some of the results, directly valuable to letters, in chief, as the record of a phase through which passed, long ago, George Moore. These books, to-day, rank somewhat with the extracts which Balzac gives you from the writings of his auctorial protagonists,—of Lucien de Rubempré, of Lousteau, of Canalis,—and which Balzac very sensibly presents not as literature *per se,* but as useful lights upon their partly taken from life and partly imagined author. So here, in depicting George Moore, does the compiler of the Carra Edition appear to illumine his subject with copious extracts from the novels of his hero, who, again, is partly taken from life.

§ 82

I must at outset confess that I find these novels are quaint reading now. They seem faded, and somewhat pathetically droll, and they a bit too aptly illustrate their writer's petted word *suranné,* the while that young George Moore toils conscientiously at a ruthless exposition of the race-track, or a depiction of the evils of drink, or is daringly describing the temptations of stage life. Yes; it really is rather quaint as long as George Moore is playing

up to his then current Vizetellean advertisements, and turning out "studies of degradation mercilessly done," or is endeavoring to convince the unwary that "you are in a moral dissecting room, watching the demonstration of a brilliant psychological surgeon." But the first moment he spies a chance to let his characters, at some breathing-spell between their disasters and their fornications, fall into talk about academic or æsthetic matters which interest George Moore, then the style quickens and fancy gallops. And the puppets discourse for pages upon pages the heresies and petulancies and "studied disrespects" of George Moore, and all advances briskly, undrugged by any narcotizing "drops of story." By and by, to be sure, the ghost of Germinie Lacerteux or of Bel-Ami (though the Carra Edition tactfully omits *Mike Fletcher*) arises to coerce the apostle of candor—the whole-hearted devotee of candor, even then,—with its gibbers about realism. But in a while the young puppet-master is again playing truant from his art's imagined responsibilities, and is contentedly expounding the notions of George Moore.

So one must not take these realistic novels overseriously. That sort of realism—the realism of "the human document" and the selected "corner of creation," here to re-echo that far time's old-fangled catchwords,—was, as they said, the "trend" of that era. And even to-day, with the innate conservatism

of youth, still do the immature laboriously transcribe the insignificant, in their exposures of the inadequacy of American standards and the loneliness of the budding artist in one or another parish of Philistia. These "trends" we, willy-nilly, must put up with. . . .

§ 83

Of course, there is not, and never has been, in any important sense, any trend in literature. One says, in any important sense, because of the so amply attested fact that the only books which ultimately count, for their permitted season, are adequate expressions, not of any ideas just then in the air (to employ that delightfully two-edged phrase), but of the individual being who wrote that particular book. And personality seems a remarkably haphazard affair. You are born, for one inexplicable reason or another, as such and such a person, as a person endowed with private and especial faults and hallucinations. And if your book is ultimately to count, however transiently, you will in your book have managed to expose that person, very much as Mr. Moore came in the end to do, without talking or thinking any nonsense about "trends." You will have contrived, in fine, your own particular "method": and in contriving it you will do well to remember that, just as I pointed out at the beginning, there must

always be, to the last digit, precisely as many "methods" as there are novelists.

Meanwhile, to be sure, the popular styles in books for the intelligentsia must always be varying, somewhat as every season the styles a little alter in disbeliefs and neckwear, and give room to some other method of irritating the conventional. And all really competent manufacturers of reading-matter, whether as publishers or authors, must always stay upon the alert to cater to the latest hebetude of serious-minded persons sufficiently cultured to assume that whatever they cannot quite understand or read with reasonable pleasure is probably high art. But the philosopher recalls that, somewhat to emend the proverb, every vogue has its day; and that, also, all literary modes must pass, pass very often with a hullabaloo, but always with rapidity.

It seems, in fact, only yesterday that both the books and the decolleté "sport shirt" of Blasco Ibáñez were the height of fashion, and *The Young Visiters* was a perdurable production. And now, in really literary circles, they tell me, the sublimities of M. Maeterlinck are no longer spoken of in lowered tones, but rather with raised eyebrows; Stevenson has become just a working model for writers upon the art of selling the short story; and even Mr. Kipling has passed into the *götterdämmerung* of be-

ing praised by Mrs. Gerould.[1] Thus suddenly their fame is made a vain and doubtful good, and the shining gloss of all their glories is vaded, in the bright prime of such impeccant prosateurs as Herman Melville and Joseph Conrad and Marcel Proust: and it is salutary to reflect that Sir Rabindranath Tagore and O. Henry, they also, were once upon a time immortal for several months. . . .

Well, and just so, in the departed youth of this George Moore, in the perverse Victorian 'eighties and 'nineties,—when, as Mr. Moore now puts it, "we were all cowed by the spell of realism, external realism,"—did many persons regard Zola and Flaubert and Maupassant and Huysmans with a seriousness which the considerate dare not wager that posterity will emulate, when it comes to appraising us and our own literary idols.

—All of which seems rather Mooreishly digressive. It would be perhaps a neater adhesion to the point succinctly to note here that, with the addition of some peculiarly delightful prefaces, the books which Vizetelly & Co. used to advertise as Mr. George Moore's Realistic Novels—listing them, one finds, with an invidious separateness from those of the firm's publications which, The Sheffield Inde-

[1] Katherine Fullerton Gerould, a writer of the day, and the author of many stories so exactly in the best manner of Henry James that they well might actually have been written during the latter years of his life by Mrs. Edith Wharton.

endent was wont to guarantee, "may be safely left ying about where the ladies of the family can pick hem up and read them,"—have, in preparing these ooks for this Carra Edition, been rewritten through- ut, alike with a view of stylistic improvement and f, as it is rather handsomely phrased, "returning rom the conventions of *Vanity Fair* and *The Small House at Allington* to those that inspired the writing f Shakespeare's plays and the Bible." Mr. Moore, t last at ease in the exclusive company of one thou- and subscribers only, can now speak freely without othering about such finicking contemporaneous no- ions of delicacy and indelicacy as, we now learn, ad until the printing of this Carra Edition some- hat hampered him. And for the rest, even in their ost tedious passages of brilliant psychology, Mr. George Moore's Realistic Novels really do remain in- eresting, as relics.

Yet there perhaps I underrate these novels, which ay be taken as interesting from quite other points f view. Mr. Moore is, for example, so convinc- gly the great prose artist everywhere in manner nd gesture that we are rather generally apt to over- ook his frequent omission to be anything of the rt in his writing. . . .

§ 84

In fact I now recall that I once, regretfully, compiled my choice of the world's ten worst writers. Regretfully, I say, because I suspected that about every author in my list I was, in all likelihood, entirely wrong. For I found that, somehow, I had listed only such writers as possessed their recognized "cults" of perfervid admirers, and such writers as a respectable lapse of time had attested—perhaps—really to make some sort of mysterious appeal to a largish number of persons. One might of course, in private, assume that æsthetically these persons bemuse themselves with notions of their own superiority and refinement. Such anæsthetic notions still enable self-complacency to pull through many pages that are perused with rather less admiration of the author than of the reader,—although, for that matter, the majority of generally acknowledged and most permanent literary reputations would seem to be based upon some similar innocuous self-deceit.

Here, in any event, are the ten "established" authors endowed with "cults" whose masterpieces once appeared to me the most violently uninteresting and ill written: Jane Austen, George Borrow, Miguel de Cervantes, Henry James, Herman Melville, George Meredith, Friedrich Nietzsche, Thomas Love Peacock, François Rabelais, and Walt Whitman.

I submitted this list without any comment save that I had made all suitable endeavors toward Melville since 1907: the antipathy was not newborn, among the bleated idiocies of his later ovine, or more robustiously arietin, admirers. And upon consideration, Peacock, I admitted, had not ever annoyed me with the relentless and deep tediousness of the others: and I for a moment inclined to strike out his name in disfavor of Marcel Proust or of James G. Huneker or of W. H. Hudson, who were at the time regarded vociferously; but refrained because that week's pother about any of these three might, after all, very well and speedily prove transient. The ten I named, though, seemed actually established in one or another sort of enduringness,—which was, to me, a fact that roused wonder not unmingled with regret. For there really must be something of enjoyment deep-hidden in the writings of these appalling persons. And, naturally, one dislikes to miss it.

§ 85

I repeat all this because to-day, upon reflection, and upon the strength of these Realistic Novels, I somewhat incline to substitute for the name of Thomas Love Peacock the name George Moore. The reputations of Mr. Moore and of Ananias, in fact, as masters of fictitious narrative, stand high

above almost equally slender pediments; with no proof anywhere existent that Ananias even attempted the difficult art wherein Mr. Moore has certainly never succeeded.

I am now about to speak with all possible moderation. For I very cordially admire the talent of Mr. Moore. That is one of the reasons why I must regret its occultation in these Realistic Novels.

It is not merely that these novels adhere to the naïve and now senescent device of assuming for the author omniscience. These stories have, that is, no stable point of view: the thoughts and the emotions of each character are divulged just as these come into being; and you are thus kept skipping, with all the agility and considerably more than the penetration of the well-named genus *pulex irritans,* from the inside of one imagined mind to the interior of another. That convention, I know, is old, it is, in fact, decrepit; but it is also childish: prose fiction really has advanced beyond such puerilities, except of course in its more popular variants and in the prevailing balderdash of the imperishable classics of prose fiction: and this convention, for me at least, destroys everywhere the illusion which I would willingly foster, destroying it for the reason that I can imagine no existence wherein I would know, even partially, what everybody was thinking and feeling.

Nor is it merely that these thin-blooded novels

are broken out with a rash of descriptory passages. I confess that, for one, the utmost I can do is to put up with the writer who formally and impersonally sets out to describe anything. When I am in my more amiable moods, then hurrying eyes glide by the solid stolid-looking paragraphs; I incuriously accept on faith the probability that the description is being competently attended to: and I, unvexed, pass on toward such portions of the book as may conceivably prove remunerative reading. . . . But far oftener am I the prey of logic and of peevishness, when I consider the malversation of time involved in every attempt to convey the true efficacy of a regarded vista, or of any observed object, by recording seriatim such attributes as, in life, we note simultaneously with plural senses. The discrepancy is the really considerable difference between a row of canned vegetable tins, howsoever painstakingly labeled, and a vegetable soup. And Lessing did so long ago dispose of the whole topic, among so many allied topics, that one would whole-heartedly like to see the passing of an examination upon the *Laokoön* made preliminary to the securing of a license to write prose. . . . No: here again, I must protest, the conscientious novelist will assume a conscious point of view. The utmost he will permit himself in the way of description is to note that which would be noted, naturally, from that point of view at that

especial moment. And all description will thus be converted into action, in the form, not necessarily stated outright, that so-and-so observed such-and-such phenomena. For I must here point out some obvious, if disregarded, truisms: that no scene or object can display any qualities unless there is some one to notice them; that, even then, these qualities stay undisplayed unless the potential observer have the needful interest and the time, just then, to notice them; and that to present these qualities as existing impersonally—howsoever general in "writing" may be this insane practise,—is to present (here again) an existence which is inconceivable.

But, passing over these grave common imbecilities, it does seem to be somebody's duty to protest against the equally grave and common delusion that Mr. Moore, even in these Realistic Novels, is "a master of English prose." The assertion is as a rule advanced, I suspect, by ordinarily well-balanced persons who have just seen or heard Mr. Joseph Conrad described as "a master of English prose," and have not utterly recovered: the prose of Mr. Moore, in any event,—not here, but in his embellished romancing about himself,—one may very often grant to be adequate. Yet Mr. Moore's vocabulary is far from adequate, for anyone who seeks distinction in an art of which the masters are omniverbarious. Here, too, variety appears a grace unthought-of; and

his employment (in these Realistic Novels) of the ready-made, time-battered phrase amounts—where his clichés do not, indeed, effuse a perturbing aspect of feeble-mindedness,—to mere wallowing in the slovenly.

I am still speaking with all possible moderation, as to a man whose writing, in his major performances, I admire. And yet I fear that what I have just said may sound overstated. . . . Well, I open the revised and final version of *A Mummer's Wife,* as it chances, at page 220; and Mr. Moore there tells me, "A word sufficed to set the whole gang recounting experiences and comparing notes." I turn to page 229, and, still avoiding dialogue, I find Mr. Moore in the rôle of narrator averring, "At the end of the act she received an ovation." Hastily I proceed to page 236, where Mr. Moore philosophises,—"As is generally the case, there was right upon both sides." Even then do I afford him another chance; I go on to the next chapter, which, upon page 245, I discover to begin, "It never rains but it pours." And thereupon I close the book: for really nobody, no matter how widely he be acclaimed a master of vigorous and delightful prose, is privileged to talk with me in just that flat and meagre tone. . . . If, for the rest, you have an hour to waste, not quite unedifyingly, you might compare almost any one of the earlier versions of Mr. Moore's more ambitious

passages with its replacer in the Carra Edition, and marvel over his faith in the stylistic thaumaturgy wrought by interjecting the word "and." And so will it become apparent to you that the haven of the artist's dream and the unfalteringly sought ideal of "revising" is not utterly inaccessible, and can be won to by and by, through steadily adhering to this bland and magic monosyllable, and by employing it to link each sentence in the book with the sentence which precedes it and with the sentence which follows it, and so to connect all the sentences into one single and sliding and ever slipping forward sentence, and languidly to model all upon the tentative and wavering progression of a long and thin and frail and flesh-tinted angle-worm. . . .

But at this point I desist from tapping at the typewriter keys; and I re-read what I have just said in —upon the whole—depreciation of Mr. Moore. And every word of it seems to me quite true. Yet it lacks that fine frank ring of amateurishness without which literary dicta are as nothing; and I appear somehow to have lapsed into the professional accent of the luckless being who makes a business of reviewing books. Now, this accent I can only describe as that of one speaking from an eminence, which it is not at all necessary to have attained. It is the accent which implies that you may by and by, should other more important interests permit, take

a Saturday afternoon off, and write a literary masterpiece of the same genre in which the discussed writer has, you benignantly allow, done his poor best during the last year or so. It is the accent with which the eunuch advocates birth control, strongly every month in The Dial, and weekly in The New York Times Book Review.[1] It is, in fine, an unlovable accent.

So I lament this accent, even in the moment that I protest it voices here—rather sniffishly, if you will, —the truth. I have endeavored to speak, I repeat, with all possible moderation. But that accent very certainly has crept in,—perhaps because I am here dealing with "realism," perhaps because of some occult underlying envy of these books' handsome physical appearance. It may be I am thinking the Biography ought to be issued thus, instead of George Moore's novels. I am sure I do not know. . . .

In any event, I reflect that Balzac, also, does not always, nor indeed as a rule, ascribe to his auctorial heroes the gift of writing especially well; that the samples which Balzac, also, presents from the novels of an imaginary author do not pretend to be fine literature; and that Mr. Moore, in preparing this Carra Edition, had thus the shield of weighty precedent. . . .

[1] Periodicals of the day, which occasionally published articles dealing with literary matters.

§ 86

The going, even so, is immeasurably better when we come, as now, to the consistently important books, to *The Confessions of a Young Man, Avowals, Memoirs of My Dead Life, Conversations in Ebury Street,* and to the *Hail and Farewell* trilogy. For here Mr. Moore is candidly, and without any vain pretence of ascribing real weightiness to anything else, expressing his own nervous reactions to painting and books and to the best examples of human thought and anatomy, and here he has turned most potently to ensnaring us with "nets woven of curious stuffs,—of a singer's corset-lace, a forgotten dream, a strand of honey-colored hair, a phrase from Walter Pater, moonlight on a pillow in Orelay, a scrap from the Catechism translated by Verlaine, hopes, and aspirations, and, here and there, a faint and not too secret shame."

Now, it is in these books, to my finding, that Mr. Moore has made perhaps his only but his ineffably interesting addition to creative literature; and has caused to move like a corporeal, breathing being of flesh and blood his one great character, George Moore. How lavishly that character repays attention by the parodist was shown but yesterday when, in *Heavens*—that most trenchant of volumes from which I have just quoted,—Mr. Louis Untermeyer

wrote what is, actually, the very best and loveliest appreciation of George Moore yet given us by anybody outside the pages of Mr. Moore. Then, too, there is the Beerbohm parody, not anything like so good, of course, but still containing its really superb sentence,—"There are moments when one does not think of girls, are there not, dear reader?" This is the sentence which George Moore has not ever, quite, dictated to his secretary: but for some years now he has fluttered close to its perfection. . . .

Yes, certainly, the character does lend itself to caricature. Yet I shall not here speak of the rôle's component oddities, nor prattle any word about the Nouvelle Athènes or the Celtic Renaissance. Nobody dare attempt in one chapter to sum up George Moore after seeing a fine artist give over a lifetime to the task. So I can but refer you to the Carra Edition, as to a longish book which is devoted entirely to this topic, with the rider that I have found nowhere volumes more engaging than are the best of these.

One's human taste for the irrelevant provokes, of course, some natural speculation as to how little of this perverse, painstaking, fleering and inconsequential personality is based upon truth? What parsimonies in veracity, how much of self-denial, in short, has Mr. Moore at odd times woven into his scandal-mongering about George Moore? I grant

that, from the reader's selfish standpoint, it does not matter; and that our general pleasure in the performance ought not to be dashed by anybody's lugging in the refrain of Edgar Allan Poe's most famous poem. For Casanova also, you will recall, indulged in the same sort of romancing; and secured his most admirable effects through mixing in some revelatory fiction with etymologically pure truth. Nor did Cellini write under affidavit. . . . Then too, to me, the George Moore of the Carra Edition suggests—with, to be sure, a difference,—that Thackeray who is really the main character of Thackeray's Collected Works, the Thackeray who is always interrupting his puppets, to edify you with the unaffected confidences of the author, as a shrewd and tolerant and tender-hearted man of the great world who, as we now know, existed nowhere outside these books. Just so, one tacitly assumes, Mr. Moore has given us George Moore as he, not wholly spurred by either moral or æsthetic criteria, would like to be: and, for one, I find—upon the whole, and if it a bit matters,—both his aspiration and his artistry to be commendable. In that unending literary shadow-show wherein "all passes except Shakespeare and the Bible," George Moore should stay for a long while one of the great characters of English fiction: and in creating him, Mr. Moore has rendered every-

body a considerable service at the price of condemning himself to eternal oblivion.

For these egotists who write perpetually about themselves are under no bond, and under no temptation whatever, to write the truth. So do we come to the reservation which I said just now I thought not unimportant: it is that in pretending to commemorate himself the self-respecting artist, who is also an egoist, substitutes an edited and a considerably embellished effigy. He immortalizes, in fine, somebody else.

And it is indeed to-day a fairly open secret that Mr. Moore in very little resembles the George Moore of the confessional romances. All persons who have known Mr. Moore in the flesh seem here unanimous: and in particular do those who have known in the flesh this historian of his own so many fleshly loves acclaim in him a beguiling tendency to rival the eremite St. Anthony in continence and imagination. "Some men kiss and do not tell,"—thus Lady Gregory has phrased it, with perfection:—"George Moore does not kiss; but he tells." Yet the point is that he "tells" very charmingly; and that therefore, beyond any possible doubt, posterity will rejoicingly accept George Moore, and, with admirable good sense, forget all about Mr. Moore.

So Mr. Moore has not hired perpetuity for him-

self, but has prolonged the existence of quite another person, through, no doubt, actual philanthropy. . . .

Nor can I think of any conceivable reason why any author, whether he be called Moore or Thackeray or Casanova,—and no matter what be his notorious repute as an egoist where other writers have with lower cunning concealed their similarity to him,—should be at pains to immortalize himself. In fact, an egoist thinks too much of himself ever to let the truth get out. And no one who has encountered and conversed with authors, whether of marked or moderate ability, can fail to note what superior persons and how much more desirable associates they are in their books. . . . Nor, of course, does that alter the truth I voiced just now: your book, if it is to count, must express your personality: but most assuredly not all of it naked. Rather, should your book suggest what you would like to make of that personality when shaved, and bathed, and becomingly clothed, and judiciously inspirited with alcohol, before going out to be, to the reach of one's ability, agreeable company.

Besides, the literary artist, I must here repeat, labors primarily to divert himself. A man can get many emotions from contemplating a quite candid portrait of the person he finds in his own mind and in the bathtub, but pleasure, I suspect, is not one of them. So when the artist takes as his ostensible

theme himself, he must take too the liberty to adorn that theme with such variations as may happen to strike his fancy. Otherwise, his art might very well fail in its main purpose, which—need I say again?—is to divert the artist.

## § 87

And I shall here claim the advantage of my own rulings, I shall here divert myself by turning candidly to egotism, without any beatings about the bush in search of even one fig-leaf. . . . I have, then, always aimed to give my writings some quality of permanence: but I am in smug accord with all the more unsympathetic of my critics in detecting in no one of my now numerous volumes any tendency to immortalize me. That is a fault of which the Biography, I rejoicingly protest, is innocent.

It would, for one matter, be unendurable to find myself portrayed in books which I so often am forced to read in the already depressing enough pursuit of misprints and blunders. For no man—as Molière and Isaiah and William Dean Howells have all not improbably observed, at some time or another,—cares quite to face the truth about himself. Looking back upon my own past, I find it undiversified, under howsoever many dappling clouds of legend, by any very striking crimes: but there is

much of what to the first glance seems shirking and equivocation, so much of petty treacheries, of small lies, and of responsibilities evaded, that I am wholeheartedly glad to reflect my private observatory is not, and never will be, open to the public. Item by item, I can explain away each one of the disfiguring features; I can prove, in my half-magnanimous and half-aggrieved meditations, that in no one of these affairs was I really to blame; and I can utterly extenuate myself from all fault and wrong-doing. I do, very often. But, at bottom,—even so,—somewhere,—lurks as if clouded with much ink the cuttlefish suspicion that I may not after all be endowed with the wholly blameless and, indeed, heroic character which mere logic assures me I possess. I have the notion, too, that many of my most near associates would agree with the suspicion rather than the logic.

And when I talk about my own doings or my personal sentiments, I momentarily detect myself in heightening, softening, or overcoloring the reality, as if in an instinctive effort to conform with what my hearer will, conceivably, expect and approve. Certainly not much of me gets into my conversation. . . . In writing, I do wax, as one might phrase it, bolder. This is largely fruit of my knowledge that to the persons among whom my physical existence is passed, my writing means nothing, or at most is

visited now and then by an unardent glance, as a highly problematic source of income: the persons about whom alone I really care will never read whatever I may elect to publish, nor ever, if by some unforeseeable circumstances compelled to do so, could they take my nonsense seriously. I am thus at liberty to write, without incurring any discomforts of actual weight, whatever I may prefer. I am nowadays even sure of getting it printed. Yet when I reflect how little I find, in so much writing, of any candid and fair expression of that person whom I with real regret accept as myself,—in my own thoughts' very privately issued version, with so many unopened leaves and with such handsome margins of error,—why, then, I am somewhat astonished and vastly pleased. . . . I marvel at, for one thing, the maniacal zeal with which I have transferred the credit for almost every line I have written, to this or the other invented "authority" or narrator. I seem from the first thus to have hidden myself as if instinctively. And moreover, in the few nooks thus unprotected, I find I have, throughout the whole Biography, enacted one who is rather wiser and more amiable, and rather more clever and more sophisticatedly broad-minded and more freakish, than I can on any terms believe myself. . . . No: I am not intimate with the author of the Biography: and now and then I suspect a certain condescension in

his manner, even toward me, because of my persistency in working for him so hard.

And all these small deceits are benefactions for everybody concerned. But the point is that every person whom egoism reduces to writing, must aspire to, and the more adroit do truly succeed in, just this laborious form of suicide and self-interment, under the effigy they find diverting.

# X

# FLAWS IN THE SPUR

"Exploits, however splendidly achieved, come, by length of time, to be less known to fame, or even forgotten among posterity. In this manner the renown of many kings has faded, and their deeds have sunk with them into the grave where their bodies lie buried,—deeds that had been performed with great magnificence when unanimous applause set them up as models before the people. The ancient Greeks, aware of this, were wise enough to use the pen as a remedy against oblivion."

*10.*

## *Flaws in the Spur*

§ 88

THE literary artist plays, I had said, not merely in such fashions as I had enumerated. He plays, even over and above all this, with the notion that his self-diversions are altruistic and for the large benefit of posterity. This idea is, to the considerate, inexplicable: but nobody need seriously question its potency. "Fame is the spur," as Milton some while since observed, that very often rowels the artist into doing rather objectionably painstaking work.

For custom assumes that time deals very carefully with reading-matter, omnisciently discarding the trash, and preserving to outlast a kingdom or two that which is finest. And probably the notion of this posthumous atonement for the current era's stupidity has heartened, in every era, the creative writer who viewed with a shared seriousness his craft and his income.

One may permissibly wonder, none the less, if time does right all unfailingly, in quite this taken-for-granted fashion. The present generation is the utmost that has thus far been produced in the way of posterity. It seems, at least, remarkable that we who have made the Saturday Evening Post a literary success second only to the Telephone Book should be the clear-eyed cognoscenti to whom dead poets appealed; and that it was in our standards of criticism they invested their life's labor and confidence. For *Les Contes Drolatiques* were, really, written for the beguilement of Dr. Brander Matthews [1] and it was with an eye upon Mr. H. L. Mencken that à Kempis compiled the *Imitation of Christ.*

§ 89

Now, not as that all-righting posterity do we approach, of course, the books we actually read. Nobody expects that our judgments of current literature be perennially brazen when two or three unbend in talk about that merchandise which is sold in the same "department" as stationery and string and glue. The rub is, rather, that our chief "classics" appear to have been selected and handed down to fame by the long arm of coincidence. That which remains to us

[1] A prominent American littérateur of the period. The titles of many of his books have been preserved, such as *His Father's Son, The Last Meeting, A Secret of the Sea,* &c.

of Greek and Roman literature composes by general consent our greatest treasure, the treasure which time has most thoroughly tested and approved. And it is precisely here that one finds least cause to suspect time of any entangling alliance with justice. There is no vaguest reason to suppose that of the Greek and Roman writers we have preserved, by any standards, what was best worth keeping; nor that of such authors as Æschylos and Aristophanes of whom oblivion has spared more than the name we have retained the masterworks. We cherish, instead, each scrap that accident has made peerless by the destruction of its betters. . . . I might go on to speak, even more tediously, of Sappho and Petronius and Plutarch, and of Virgil's foiled endeavors to destroy the latter part of his *Æneid*—and about the dream that revealed the hiding place of Dante's lost cantos, and about John Warburton's cook, and about how the Bible came by its present contents,—to show through what queer accidents the world's chief "classics," the books which are likely always to remain in theory man's finest literary achievements, have been made just what they are. But the point is that they might quite as easily have been something else. The point is that they have not earned their present and probably perpetual rank by their preeminence in special qualities, nor by any æsthetic principle whatever. And if the supreme names and

masterpieces of the world's literature have been tagged as such by justice,—which always remains just barely possible,—it was done without removing her bandage, in the hazards of a game of blind man's buff.

But I refrain in charity from such pedantic considerations. Here is real need, though, to point out that before printing became pandemic the only way in which anybody's writing won a chance of survival was by some other person's finding its matter sufficiently congenial to be at pains to make a copy of it. In nature, that which most rapturously recorded the inane struck home to most bosoms, upon the chronic principle that still procures admirers for the philosophy of Dr. Frank Crane,[1] and for the novels of Floyd and Ethel Dell: [2] so, from the first, have long odds favored earnest mediocrity. . . . To the vitality of the mediocre I shall return. Meanwhile that dangerous invention of Gutenberg's has changed all; and has ensured a fair chance of perpetuity for that which is excellent, provided always this excellence be not swept away unnoted and hidden by the spume and froth of the torrential river it floats in,

[1] A newspaper writer of the day. He specialized in very short editorials, so notably preëminent, even in American journalism, for feeble-mindedness that these were published, simultaneously, by some fifty of the leading papers of the United States, and were read everywhere with edification.

[2] Novelists of the day; authors of *Charles Rex, Janet March, Greatheart,* &c.

that ever-passing deluge of the current books. Sometimes befalls a favoring miracle of salvage, and such dissimilar lost argosies as those of Samuel Butler and Herman Melville return upstream with flying colors. But who may say how deep, how irretrievably, their betters may not lie sunken? or can gravely assert that literary permanence is in any very general demand among the buyers or publishers or writers of new books? . . . Indeed, I know of no class of men which quite whole-heartedly desires the production and formal recognizing of any more "classics": since even those who care for fine literature cannot but obscurely feel that there is already a deal more of it existent than any human being can hope to assimilate; and that already the literary pantheon of the self-respecting is thronged with gods whose virtues we are compelled, in this limited lifetime, to accept as an article of faith. There is, for example, Defoe or Richardson—or, of more recent hierarchs, Mr. Thomas Hardy or Mr. Joseph Conrad,—before the shrine of each of whom many are zealous to pass with every form of respect which does not entail stopping. And I suspect, if the persons who cry up *Don Quixote* were afforded a choice between silence and reading every line of this world-famous "classic," there would no longer be any need to think an instant before you pronounce its name.

§ 90

But I spoke of the vitality of the mediocre. The quality which makes for acknowledged greatness in a writer is—I know not how many textbooks have assured us,—the universality of his appeal. His ideas are, in brief, the ideas which the majority of persons find acceptable; and Shakespeare has been praised, for once with absolute justice, as "the myriad-minded," because myriads have always had just such a mind as his. The writer of "classics," in short, has need of quite honest and limited thinking, and of an ability to utter platitudes with that wholesome belief in their importance which no hypocrisy nor art can ever mimic. . . . Of the letters of a foreign nation nobody can speak without some danger of magnifying his everyday folly. But it appears safe here to point out that the main treasures of our national literature, including its British tributaries, really are, when considered in the light of the ideas they express, rather startlingly silly. The "ideas" of Chaucer and Shakespeare and Milton, when once looked at without prejudice, appear to wander sheepishly from the platitudinous to the imbecile, the while that their "stories" rove, in somewhat more the manner of the mountain goat, about the heights of idiocy. And when you compare the reality with the ideas which Scott and Thackeray

and Dickens quite gravely expressed about human existence, the incongruity breathes more of pathos than of mirth: for these novelists expressed the usual ideas.

Most persons really do believe, for example, that complete and abiding happiness is to be won by marriage until they have tried it: and, for that matter, widows have been known to carry this romanticism to the extreme of taking a second husband. And most persons do honestly believe that, in the outcome, wickedness is punished and virtue is rewarded (again) with a complete and abiding happiness: and in consequence of this belief most persons make it a point in social intercourse to check their natural, not infrequent impulses toward rape and murder. Most persons do, in fact, for various reasons, think it best to be "good"; and do expect, for equally various reasons, to be happy by and by. Now, with hardly an exception, the concededly "classic" writers have, without any detectable scepticism, set forth such popular notions, with every fit adornment of rhetoric and cunning diction: and their ideas have endured for the plain reason that they were endurable.

§ 91

Yet here again, I am afraid, the fool is answered according to his folly. It is, when you think of it, a

rather dreadful fate to become a classic. Once the writer is thus deified, his private character is the first burnt offering. He has well hidden himself beneath the effigy he found diverting; he rests thereunder, untroubled: but about his tomb frisk commentators obviously raised, by a superior education, from that troglodytic race which enlivens the public privies with verse. For his cult has need of a legend, and prefers a highly colored epopee of lechery and sexual curiosa, such as affords vicarious outlet to those desires which we imprison fearfully in ourselves, and reveals the demigod to be no better than anybody else. So Mary Fitton and Georgina Hogarth and Mrs. Brookfield are dragged into the saga: stout volumes are devoted to proving that Wordsworth begot a bastard, or that Byron was caught in incest with his sister; nobody appears able to write about Molière without suggesting that his wife was also very probably his daughter: and all our literary gossip becomes a whispered and sniggered ritual of phallic worship.

Nor do many of the auctorially great escape calumny in the form of a Complete Edition, wherein their self-confessed failures at writing, and the chips and rubbish of the workshop, and the rough draughts and notes designed for the waste-basket, and the politic ephemeræ into which most writers are allured by kindness and advertising purposes, are pid-

dlingly amassed to be bound up, in pompous scavengery, with all the unsigned refuse from the back files of magazines which can be "attributed" to the victim. None other of the dead has even his appointed executors combined to convict him of idiocy. And of course those less put-upon immortals who are recollected, however infrequently, by virtue of one book alone are but too apt to get into some such collection as Everyman's Library, and have the upshot of their existence identified with the twaddle and smug tediums of Trollope and Jane Austen and Mary Cowden Clarke.

And the writer who is raised to the peerage of the remembered dead is likewise granted an estate, commensurate with his dignity, in the fields of human aversion. Luckless typesetters have to read every word of his books; in your library he usurps grudged shelfroom in the bright armor of a binding too handsome to be relegated to the dustheap of any married man; the oppressed young have his loathed archaisms included in their "parallel reading" at school, where also they are sometimes put to the *peine dure et forte* of "parsing" him; in women's clubs he incurs the stigma of being quoted with approval from the platform, by persons in the bankruptcy of mind appropriate to that deadly eminence; and dear old bishops likewise quote him in their sermons, utilizing his dreams as hypnotics. . . . He be-

comes, in fine, a nuisance, and is thought of with mingled condescension and haziness and dislike. And it appears, to the considerate, a prodigality of currishness, thus in so many ways to "beat the bones of the buried" because their outcast owner once voiced memorably the common beliefs and hopes,—the tonic fallacies, the sustaining delusions,—which keep a vigorous heart in the ribs, and marrow in the bones, of all that are not buried, not yet.

Here is no need to assume, however, that every classic author has from the beginning been commonplace in absolutely everything. It may happen, indeed, that a writer putting forth an unpopularly rational thought may have his heresy so generally assailed and so often controverted as to make it sufficiently hackneyed for wide acceptance: but mediocrity, even in "daringness" and "unconventionality," thrives from the first; and is the firmlier assured of posterity's respectful reprinting. And the display of uncommon mentality is, as a rule, as fatal to the literary life of a book as it is to the physical life of man.

§ 92

For there really does seem to be over all a force —to be labelled what you will,—that is hostile to the undue development, in any direction, of man's mind. Here death is not directly involved: rather, does it

appear to be life which is resolute to use men within very inflexible limits. . . . And so I now incline to dismiss those earlier notions as to nothing being apparent anywhere except the operation and products of death. I begin to play with the fancy that life is indeed aiming at something quite definite; and that the wise man's part therein is to be patient, to cling to mediocrity, and to get bread and children, and presently to die, with no more of active discomfort than may be unavoidable.

It well may be, I reflect, that all is not at loose ends; and that some scheme of happenings is foreordained; and that we serve in it, somehow, when we live tranquilly and propagate; since, certainly, the desire to do just these two things is the one human desire encountered everywhere.

And perhaps—I yet further speculate,—the phenomena called "literary genius" and "artistic ability" are vexatious little mishaps, a trifle gone wrong, in the broad working out of a plan which they minutely hamper. . . . So the contretemps is remedied. The person afflicted with "genius" is removed, be it by his other diseases or by his fellows' natural dislike of him, it hardly matters: either way, there is by ordinary in his removal a smack of haste: and you will note that, whether in polity or mercy, it is somehow provided that his children do not inherit his affliction. . . . So does life seem to keep her pawns from

errancy. So does she seem to restrict them, with now and then some show of pettishness, to the arena and service of her large and dim and patient gaming: and wisdom bids us emulate this patience, in the time that we get bread and children, and strive to die with no more of active discomfort than may be unavoidable.

And yet, even so, in the bared teeth of outraged reason, no one of us rests quite content to be a mere transmitter of semen, and to serve as one of many millions of instruments in life's inexplicable labor, used for a little while as such, and then put by, worn out and finished with forever. We appeal against oblivion. And not only does the shatter-pated artist appeal: the Pharaohs have filed pyramidic caveats, the best-thought-of business-men yet enter demurrers in the form of public libraries: there is no tombstone however modest but insanely appeals to posterity to keep in mind somebody's dates of birth and death and middle name.

For we will to continue here, in the world known to us, to continue if only as syllables. We all will not to be forgotten utterly by those that must so soon inherit our familiar dear estate of tedium and muddle-headedness and fret and failure; and that in our places will get bread and children; and that after our going will in our beds be striving to die with no more of active discomfort than may be unavoidable.

Yet here is an odd thing: we can pretend to offer no example worth the following, not even any salutary instance of just what to avoid; nor can we, in any of the limbos which have been divinely revealed, thus far, derive from being so remembered one minim of profit. We are spurred by neither altruism nor self-seeking; the counsellor that persuades to the appeal remains anonymous: and it seems that, here again, some power which mocks at reason, or at least at human reason, is moving us to serve unknown but, one suspects, not unappointed ends.

For we do not know, either here or elsewhere, what ends may be appointed: but we do know, I think, that every wise man will avoid too much of guesswork, in the brief while that he gets bread and children, and patiently foreplans to die with no more of active discomfort than is unavoidable.

## § 93

Thus, then, I reflected, now that I approached my summing up, the writer who is sustained by the notion of his books' being perpetual things cannot, after two minutes of honest thought, believe himself to be sustained also by altruism, nor by any faith in the superior discernment of posterity. Upon no ground perceptible to me could reason detect, the instant that reason weighed the present rate and direction of

man's progress, any marked likelihood of posterity's being in anything more logical than is that contemporaneous, so huge and so depressingly unimpressed audience which every artist must perforce contemn. Posterity in its approach to literary matters would probably muddle forward, as man has always done, upon humanity's time-tested crutches of hearsay and stupidity. The men who after our departure inherited the gray tedium of man's daily living would keep some of our books (but not really read them), and others of our books they would destroy, not in any haphazard fashion, but acting always under the adamantean human compulsion to be illogical about everything.

Not any art or painstaking, nor certainly any accident of "genius," could enable a book to live. Chance alone appeared to do that, and then only in a very limited sense. And in this final, frantic, and yet optimistic appeal to posterity—here, too, man clung to his great racial custom of being illogical about everything; and every serious author triumphantly attested himself to be, after all, quite human. That seemed the conclusion of the matter. . . .

So I ran over my enlinked deductions. Man lived, for the major part of his conceded time, a meagre and monotonous and unsatisfying existence: this he alleviated by endlessly concocting fictions which be-

drugged and diverted him. The artist, and in particular the literary artist, like every other person animate, attempted to bedrug and divert primarily himself; which end the literary artist gained, as a rule, by picturing himself as figuring enviably in unfamiliar surroundings, and as making sport with the three martinets that he, in common with all men at bottom, most genuinely abhorred,—that is, with common-sense and piety and death. Moreover, he diverted himself by playing with such human ideas as he found entertaining: and he played too with the notion of hoodwinking posterity into accepting and treasuring his highly imaginative portrait of himself. And the outcome of his multifold playing—of that interminable self-diversion which he, quite unsmilingly, called his "work,"—was always unpredictable, always chance-guided, and, in any case, was of no benefit or hurt to him by and by, and was never of grave importance to anybody else. That seemed to be the whole truth about the literary artist. That seemed the gist of the epilogue I had now evolved for the Biography of Dom Manuel's life, and was submitting to myself to-night as the explanation of why I had given over so many years to writing.

Yes, all my premises seemed true: my deductions appeared to hold together. My logic and its upshot, in any event, contented me. What, I had begun by asking, does the author get out of it all? Well, I had

found that unknown quantity; the equation now was solved; and $x$ amounted to, exactly, nothing. That was the mathematics of it: only, as you may recall, it had been revealed to me, through the aid of my small son, that mathematics too amounted to, exactly, nothing. And, besides, here also, in reaching this negation, I had most gratifyingly attained, in the same moment that I discredited, the aim of every valid author. For I had found, I reflected, even here, some rather interesting ideas to play with. . . . Yes, and my argument ended, neatly, with the day: for the clock behind me was now striking midnight. . . .

THE AUTHOR OF THE EAGLE'S SHADOW

"To the citizens and all the realm I make this proclamation: for now have I moored my bark of life, and so will own myself a happy man. Many are the shapes that fortune takes, and oft the gods bring things to pass beyond our expectation. That which we deemed so sure is not fulfilled, while for that we never thought would be, Heaven finds out a way. And such hath been the issue in the present case."

## *The Author of The Eagle's Shadow*

### § 94

"WOULD you advise me, sir," he was asking, "to become a regular writer—now?"

For I had got just this far, and, as I have said, the clock behind me was just striking midnight, when I was interrupted by an unlooked-for visitor.

Most writers, for their sins, are used to the incursions of the literarily-inclined young man (with, as a rule, quite dreadful manuscripts hidden about his person) who wants advice as to his life-work. But that this especial young man should be calling upon me for that purpose, or for any other purpose, did, I confess, even on Walburga's Eve, astonish me. . . .

For he undeniably sat there. He was fat, remarkably fat for a lad of twenty-two or thereabouts; and he had, as I noticed first of all, most enviably thick hair, sleeked down, and parted "on the side" with some fanfaronade in the way of capillary flourishes. He was rather curiously dressed, too, I considered:

the lapels of his coat were so small and stiff; they were held in place, I deduced, by a coat-spring, which would be to-day, I could have no doubt, the only coat-spring in existence. And he wore a fawn-colored waistcoat, and his rigorous collar towered, incredible in height, above a sky-blue "Ascot tie," which was resplendently secured with a largish sword-hilt asparkle everywhere with diamonds. And to describe the majestic rotundities of this boy's shoulders as due to "padding" would be through understatement to deceive you; since these coat-shoulders could have been designed and builded (I reflected), by no imaginable tailor, but only by an upholsterer. . . . It must have been, in fine, a good twenty years since I had seen anybody appareled quite as he was. . . .

"You see, I have just sold three stories to magazines," he continued, "and I was wondering, sir, if you would advise me to become a regular writer now."

To that I gave my customary, sage and carefully considered reply. "Of course," I informed him, "there is a great deal to be said upon both sides."

"I wrote five, you see: and I mailed them all out together. And The Smart Set took one; and The Argosy took the one I sent them, too; and Mr. Alden wrote me a real nice letter about the one I sent Harper's, and said they would be very glad

to use it if I would let them say 'paunch' where I had written 'belly'—"

"Dear me! and so you are already writing with offensive coarseness. But don't mind me. Go on."

"Well, but I was just going to say, and that's all right, of course, though you do sort of think of Falstaff as having one. But the other two came back, although I can't see why, when you look at the stuff those very magazines—!"

"You will see, by and by," I assured him: "and then you will wonder about the stories that did not come back."

"Anyhow, I got a hundred and five dollars for the lot of them. Yes, sir, not a cent less. And to have three out of five stick, the very first time, is pretty unusual, don't you think?"

To that I assented. "It is the bait in the trap, it is the stroke of doom, it is the tasted pomegranate of Persephone."

"Then I have the notion for a book, too. It's about a young man who is in love with a girl—"

"That now is a good idea. It is an idea that has possibilities."

"—Only, he can't ask her to marry him, because she has lots of money, and he is poor. Of course, though, it all comes out all right in the end. His uncle left another will, you see."

"Now was that will, by any chance," I wondered,

"discovered long years afterward, in the secret drawer of an old desk? and did it transform your high-minded but impoverished hero into a multi-millionaire?"

And the young man asked, "Why, how did you know?"

"It is not always possible to explain these divinations. Such flashes of imaginative clairvoyance just incommunicably come to me sometimes."

He considered this. He said, with a droll sort of awe, "Probably you do think of things quicker after you have been writing so long—"

I shook my head morosely. "Quite the contrary."

"And of course you have written so many books that— You see, I naturally read them, on account of our similarity in names—"

"You liked them, I hope?"

Very rarely have I seen any young man counterfeit enthusiasm less convincingly. "Why, how can you ask that, I wonder! when everybody knows that your books, sir—!"

"Come, come!" I heartened him, "I have been reviewed a great deal, remember! The production of articles as to my plagiarisms and obscenities ranks as a national industry. Very lately Judge Leonard Doughty [1] exposed me to all Texas as a chancre-laden rat whose ancestry had mixed and simmered

[1] Nothing is known of him.

in the devil's cauldron of Middle Europe. And, besides, since Professor Fred L. Pattee [1] let the news get out, in perfectly public print, that I am dead and my soul is already in hell, there does not seem much left for any moderately optimistic person to be afraid of."

"Well, but," the young man pointed out, "I'm not unbiased. There is so much about me in your books, you see, sir; and you do make me seem sort of funny. You sort of keep poking fun at me."

"I know. But I cannot help it. For you appear to me, I confess, the most ridiculous person save one that I have ever known. I am the other person."

"Well, I am afraid I don't entirely like your books, sir," he conceded.

And I sat looking at him, both amused and saddened. For never until to-night had it occurred to me how unutterably would this especial young man dislike my books if ever he could know of them. And he was trying so hard, too, to be polite about it.

## § 95

"Why do you do it, sir?" the boy asked now, almost reproachfully. "You get a plenty of pleasure

[1] Dr. Pattee is stated to have lectured professionally, at Pennsylvania State College, upon what patriotism described as American literature. He is known to have edited Shakespeare's *Macbeth,* and to have contributed to The American Mercury.

out of life, don't you? and what did you want, anyhow, that you never got?"

"Yes: and I don't know," I admitted, seriatim.

"Well, then, why don't you write some books that will make people see the world is a pretty good sort of place after all?"

"But surely it does not require two persons to point out such an obvious geographical feature? Cannot posterity rely upon you, by and by, to diffuse that truism single-handed?"

"I certainly do hope so," he replied. Now his voice changed. "For I would like to write the very nicest sort of books,—like Henry Harland's and Justus Miles Forman's and Anthony Hope's. They would be about beautiful fine girls and really splendid young men, and everything would come out all right in the end, so they could get married, and not be sort of bitter and smart-alecky and depress people the way"—he coughed,—"the way some people do."

"Young man," I started out severely, "it is quite evident you are not married—"

To which he countered, now I think of it, rather staggeringly. "But you, sir, are not in love. You never will be, sir, not ever any more."

I said: "Yes; that does make a difference. I remember." Then I said: "Stop talking bosh! and stop calling me 'sir'! I'm not your grandfather. It is rather the other way round. And, besides, we

were talking about books. Well, you may try, if you like, to write the blithering kind of novel you describe. But, somehow, I don't think you will ever succeed at it."

"You ought to know best, sir, of course, about my abilities. And so, if you would really and truly advise me— Still, I would certainly like to be a real author—"

He was looking at me now, across that remarkable blue tie and shiny sword-hilt, with very touching deference, and with, of all conceivable emotions, envy. I understood, with the most quaint of shocks, that I possessed every one of the things which this preposterous young fellow wanted. I had written and published, sometimes even with commercial extenuation, at least as many magazine stories and books as he hoped by and by to have to his credit: I could imagine how my comfortable-looking large home, and my ownership of actual stocks and bonds, and my acquaintance with a number of more or less distinguished persons, would figure in his callow mild eyes: and I had tasted, too, if not of fame, most certainly of all the notoriety he ever aspired to. Why, but what does it not seem to this pathetic boy, I reflected, actually to have one's picture in the papers! For I could well remember certain ancient glancings toward that awesome pinnacle of being a celebrity.

I was, in fine, by this boy's standards, a success. I had to-day each one of the things he had ever consciously desired. That really was a rather terrible reflection. . . .

§ 96

But he was speaking. "Then you would honestly advise me, sir, not to take up writing as a regular thing?"

"I don't see how I can advise you that,—not honestly, at least. For you will get out of the writing all—heaven help you!—that you hope to get."

"Why, then—" He was abeam.

"You simply wait until you have got it! You can attend to your grinning then, if you feel like it. For you will get every one of the things you think you want. Only, you will get them by the, upon the whole, most philanthropic process of not ever writing any of the mush which you now plan to write."

"But I don't understand—"

"Nor do I, either, quite. But from the start will be tugging at your pen a pig-headed imp that will be guiding it his way instead of the way you intended. And with each book he will be growing stronger and more importunate and more cunning, and he will be stealing the pen away from you for longer and longer intervals. And by and by that imp, full grown now and the very devil of a taskmas-

ter, will be dictating your books from beginning to end,—not to speak here of his making you sweat blood when you revise, at his orders, all the earlier ones."

"Come, now,"—and the young fellow was looking at me rather like a troubled cow,—"come, now, sir, but you don't really mean I am going to be possessed by a devil?"

"Some people will put it that way, only a bit less politely. But I would say, by a dæmon. Socrates had one, you may remember."

"Yes, but this one—?"

"You," I replied, "will call him the desire to write perfectly of beautiful happenings. Other persons will call him quite different things. Anyhow, with time, you will fall into a sort of bedrugging dæmon-worship, and you will go the way he commands you, without resisting any longer. It will be most deplorable. So Professor Henry A. Beers [1] will have, after all, to dismiss your literary claims from the pale of serious consideration, because you are not of Colonial stock—"

The boy viewed this as urgent. "But, sir, my father's people came in 1727, and my mother's in 1619—"

"That will not matter. Facts are but reeds in the wind of moral indignation. And Maurice Hewlett

[1] Connected with Yale University.

must become very cuttingly sarcastic about your being a Jew brought up on the Talmud—"

"Me, sir?"

"Most certainly, you. And a transfigured Richard Le Gallienne,[1] purified by his intellectual death and descent into the helotage of reviewing, will be compelled to unmask you as a moral and spiritual hooligan with a diminutive and unkempt and unsavory ego. And an enterprising young person named Bierstadt[2] will, on the strength of having twice had luncheon with you, write out for The Bookman a remarkably intimate account of how partial you are to provoking tragedies and throwing flesh-pots at people's heads. And there will be others,—oh, quite a number of others. . . . So that, altogether, you perceive, you will get, through this dæmon-worship, into some trouble."

Very rarely have I seen any young man more unaffectedly appalled. "But look here, sir! I don't want to get into any trouble. I simply want to contribute to the best magazines, and write some wholesome and nice entertaining books, that will sell like *The Cardinal's Snuff-Box* and *The Prisoner of Zenda*."

"I know. It is rather funny that you should begin with just those goals in view. You will not ever at-

[1] An English writer of some promise under the latter years of Victoria's reign.

[2] See note on Judge Leonard Doughty, page 288.

tain them. That will not matter so much—after a while. But what will very vitally matter—to you, anyhow,—is that, having once meddled with the desire to write perfectly of beautiful happenings, you will not ever be able to forswear your dæmon. And such folly is, of course, enough to set every really well-thought-of person in America braying. So that in time—who knows—you too may come to be a chancre-laden rat, and a German Jew with a soul in hell and simmered ancestors and a notoriously unkempt ego, and may otherwise help out with the week's literary gossip."

Whereon the young man rose; and he remarked, with a perhaps not wholly unwarranted uncertainty, "Then you advise me, sir—?"

"I cannot advise you the one way or the other. I am merely forewarning you that, if you insist upon writing books, you will get what you wanted."

He smiled now, brightly, intimately, strangely. "I see: but isn't that also in the one way which matters," he demanded of me, "true?"

And I smiled back at him. "Yes," I admitted, "it seems true in the one way which matters, also."

"Why, then," said he, "I reckon I had better keep right on with *The Eagle's Shadow.*"

And after that he went quite suddenly away. He returned, I imagine, to 1902 or thereabouts.

I hope he did, for his sake. There was a rather

nice girl awaiting him, back there in 1902. Then, in addition to her, he would have the facile, false inspirations of *The Eagle's Shadow* to play with, I reflected, as I went back, a little saddened somehow, to concocting the needed epilogue for the long Biography of Dom Manuel's life. . . .

## § 97

But that queer boy's brief visit had quite broken my train of thought. His passing seemed, indeed, to have disproved my train of thought. For the instant I had proved, to my own satisfaction, that what I, in common with all creative writers, got out of writing was, exactly, nothing,—at that same moment he had appeared with his mild, bleated, so respectful question, "Would you advise me, sir, to become a writer—now?"

And I had answered his question. I had failed, at least, to advise him not to become "a regular writer." I had, virtually, admitted that were my youth restored to me, as Jurgen's was, and had I my life to muddle through all over again, I would, still somewhat in the Jurgenic manner, repeat its unprofitable dedication. I could not deny to him, I could not truthfully deny to anybody, that, in the one way which really seemed to count, I had in the end got what I wanted.

§ 98

No doubt it had been intermixed with a great deal which nobody could conceivably enjoy. From the beginning my books had been strong irritants to many of their readers,—it might be that their manner was annoying, indeed, as Dr. Canby put it, "to all warm-hearted people." In any event there were my scrapbooks bulging with "reviews" by persons who appeared to have written in seizures of incoherent rage, without ever having discovered precisely what they were angry about. These chattered denunciations had begun with *The Eagle's Shadow:* and no book by me had since failed to evoke them in respectable volume. . . . *The Cords of Vanity,* in fact, had seemed to unhinge all power of self-control and self-expression in well-nigh everybody who wrote about it: the scrapbooks which contained the press clippings relative to this novel suggested just the corybantics and mowings of a madhouse. The people who had at most length and most bitterly denounced "such a book as *Jurgen*" did at least base upon understandable ground their claims to be heard with respect,—this ground, of course, being that their judgment had been kept healthily uncontaminated by their abstention from reading *Jurgen.*

Nor was time outmoding this frenzy. *The High Place* seemed to have aroused in sundry quarters

much the same quality of inexplicable or, in any event, of unexplained fury. There was no doubt about it: the instinctive reaction of many, many persons everywhere to each one of my books—even, as it seemed, without reading them,—had been the instant, unreasoning response of a reputable business-man or of a bull to the Soviet flag. . . . And that had not been pleasant.

Apart from those who went about thus incommunicatively raging, had been the pitilessly explicit. These had, indeed, been tirelessly explicit in their exposure of my auctorial crimes and defects. Nobody could pretend to remember all the literary vices which I had practised nor all the contagions in which I had been detected, but every one of these infamies had, as I recalled it, been competently exposed, over and over again. I was both knave and imbecile, whose "mannered" writing was mere kleptomania; I had, indeed, no sort of natural endowments once you excepted the singular nastiness of my feeble mind: such were the facts that had been quite regularly deplored, now I thought of it, for the fifth part of a whole century. And when the press clippings came in next week, somebody would, I knew, still be regretting these facts. I could have little doubt that for the rest of my life I would be continually encountering these regrets. . . . And that, too, was not pleasant.

What the reviewers had said did not, especially and eventually, matter. They were, in fact, to-day united in their abuse nowhere except in my scrap-books: I alone had—now for some twenty years, and rather charitably, I thought,—been at pains to preserve their utterances. Otherwise, all of yesterday's Olympians had loosed their thunderbolts and had passed sonorously; and each demolishing of me was to-day as little remembered as was any other of that year's thunderstorms. To-day—if with a lessened frequency, from even loftier altitudes,—still now and then descended peltingly the onslaughts of young godlings. Yet to-day I still clung, somehow, to the belief that my intelligence and morals were not so markedly below the average as I was constantly assured. And, in the manner of those elder tempests, so likewise, I knew, must pass away the reverberant condescensions of the young, who were condemned as yet to appraise my book, and all books, in the light of their contrast with that masterpiece which youth is immemorially about to dash off on some vacant Saturday afternoon. For presently these godlings too would turn from the serious work of reviewing creative literature to the diversion of writing it. . . .

And whatever any other formally empowered or free-lance commentator might futurely say, whether in print or conversation, about my stupidity and crass plagiarisms and self-conceit and futile pruri-

encies, would not, I knew, matter either, in itself. The one trouble was that all this maintained a clouded and sulphuric atmosphere in which I dubiously moved, so far as went the thoughts of so many dear, dull persons. . . . Meanwhile I had got the hearing which throughout eighteen years of unreason I had hoped to get, and had always believed to be imminent; and the book which I had written, in the Biography, was finished, more or less, and would for its allotted season remain. With the length, or, if you will, with the extreme brevity of that season, I had no concern: it was enough to know that the Biography was finished, and would outlast me.

## § 99

For that infernal boy had drawn from me the truth: I really had got out of life what I most wanted. I had wanted to make the Biography: and I had made it, in just the way which seemed good to me. To do that had been, no doubt, my play and my diversion, in the corridors where men must find diversion, whether in trifling with bank notes or women, whether in clutching at straws or prayer-books, or else go mad: and my enlinked deductions held as far as the chain stretched. But one link more was needed. For it seemed to me, too, that I had somehow fulfilled, without unduly shirking, an obli-

gation which had been laid upon me to make the Biography. I was not, heaven knew, claiming for myself any heavenly inspiration or even any heavenly countenance. Rather, it seemed to me that the ability and the body and the life which transiently were at my disposal had been really used: with these lent implements which were not ever properly speaking mine, and which presently would be taken away from me, I had made something which was actually mine. That something was the Biography. . . .

§ 100

And still,—with all the bright day gone, and with the deepest gloom of midnight also an affair of the past,—still, I seem not quite to have found that final link, not wholly to have completed my epilogue. Some word, as yet unthought of, stays needed to round off all. . . .

Here then, upon this shelf, in these brown volumes which make up the Biography, I can lay hand and eye upon just what precisely my life has amounted to: the upshot of my existence is here before me, a tangible and visible and entirely complete summing up, within humiliatingly few inches. And yet, as I consider these inadequate brown volumes, I suspect that the word I am looking for is "gratitude." It most certainly is not "pride": and, as I hastily ad-

mit, nobody else is called on to share in my suspicion.

But I at least, who have found human living and this world not wholly admirable, and who have here and there made formal admission of the fact, feel that in honor one ought to acknowledge all courtesies too. With life, then, I, upon the whole, have no personal quarrel: she has mauled, scratched and banged, she has in all ways damaged me: but she has permitted me to do that which I most wanted. So that I must be, I suppose, grateful.

—With which decision I very lightly pass my finger-tips across these fifteen book-backs; and touch in this small gesture, so didactically small, the whole of that to which, for good or ill, I have amounted. And thereafter (with a continuing sense of wholesome allegory) I go quietly to bed.

*Dumbarton Grange,*
*30 April, 1924.*

EXPLICIT

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